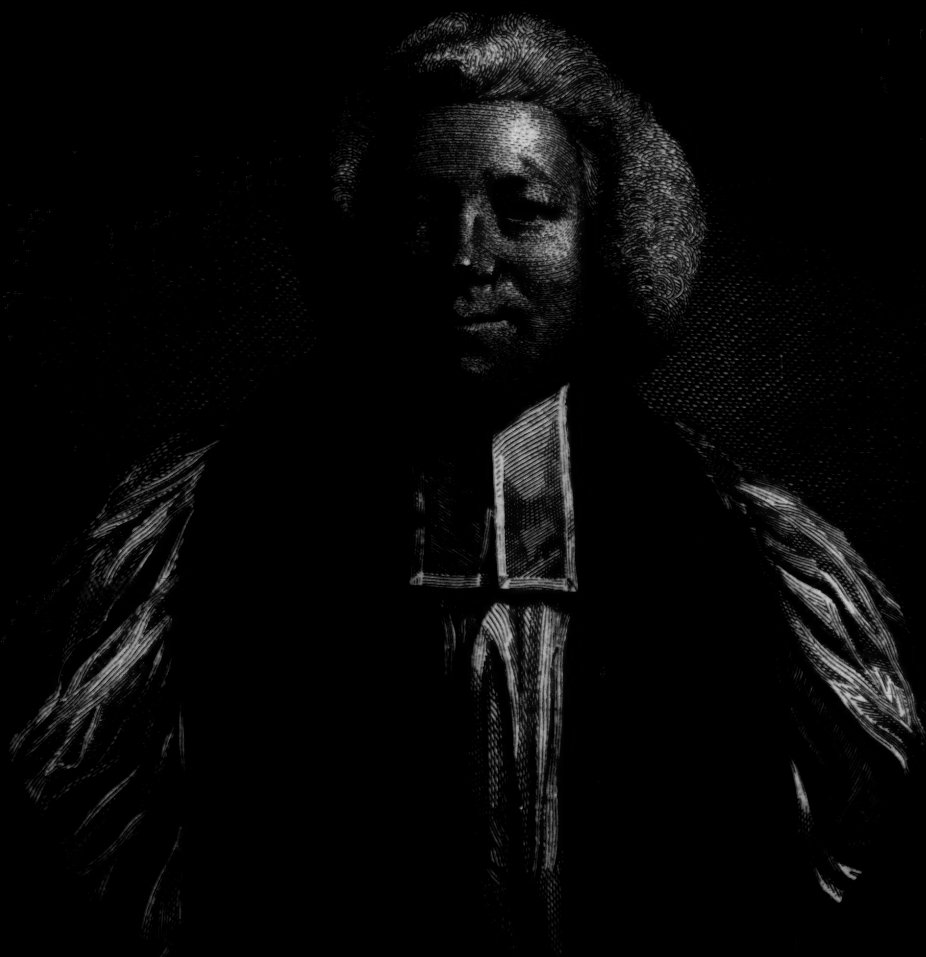


2.L.f.
35

THE
WORKS
OF
THE RIGHT REVEREND
JONATHAN SHIPLEY, D.D.
LORD BISHOP OF ST. ASAPH.





JONATHAN SHIPLEY D.D.
BISHOP of S.^t ASAPH.

For Joshua Reynolds, Pinx.

T. Trotter Sculp.

Published as the act directs April the 2.^d 1792 by T Cadell Strand.

THE
WORKS
OF

THE RIGHT REVEREND

JONATHAN SHIPLEY, D. D.

LORD BISHOP OF ST. ASAPH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR T. CADELL, IN THE STRAND.

M.DCC.XCII.

35

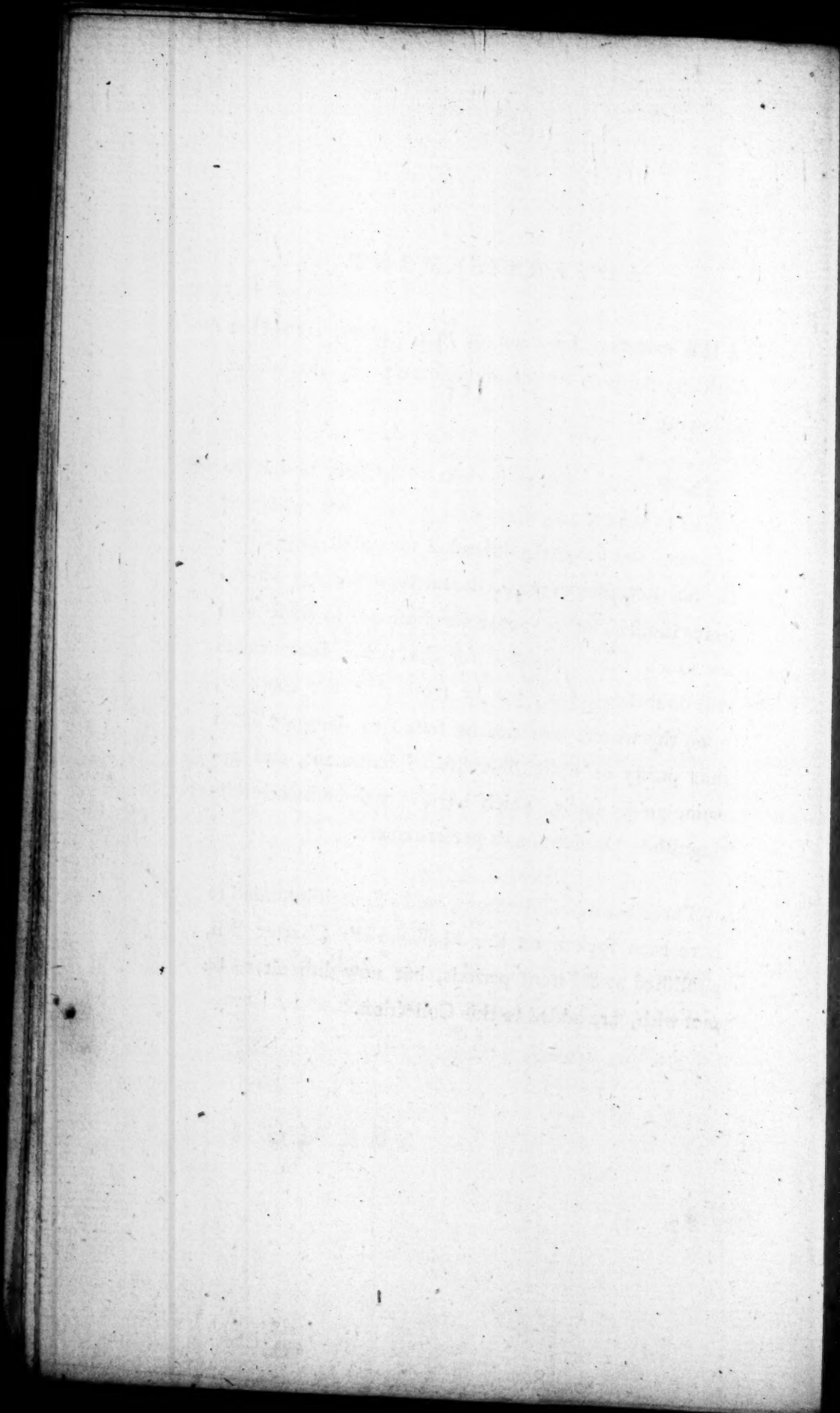


ADVERTISEMENT.

THE earnest solicitation of many nearly connected with the Author, has occasioned the production of the following Volumes.

The Publisher thinks it right to declare, he has no reason to believe any part of them, now first appearing in print, was originally intended for public inspection. He has not, however, presumed to make any alterations himself, or to apply for assistance to those who are much better qualified for the task. Inaccuracies will doubtless occur; yet he trusts that the contents, upon the whole, will not be found to derogate from that purity of style, liberality of sentiment, and genuine public spirit, which have ever so eminently distinguished Dr. SHIPLEY's performances.

Three occasional Sermons, and a Speech intended to have been spoken on the Massachusetts Charter Bill, published at different periods, but now difficult to be met with, are added to this Collection.



CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

I COR. X. 31.

*Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or
whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory
of God.* - - - I

SERMON II.

HEB. i. 1, 2.

*God, who at sundry times and in divers
manners spake in time past unto the
fathers by the Prophets, hath, in these
last days, spoken unto us by his Son.* 23

SERMON

S E R M O N I I I .

P S A L M I . 2 I .

*Thou thoughtest that I was altogether
such a one as thyself.* - - 41

S E R M O N I V .

G E N . x l v . I .

*Then Joseph could not refrain himself
before all them that stood by him; and
he cried, Cause every man to go out
from me; and there stood no man with
him while Joseph made himself known
unto his brethren.* - - 73

S E R M O N V .

L U K E x v i . 8 .

*The children of this world are in their
generation wiser than the children of
light.* - - - 103

S E R M O N

CONTENTS. ix

S E R M O N VI.

PSALM cvii. 43.

*Whofo is wife, and will observe these
things, even they shall understand the
loving kindnefs of the Lord.* - 127

S E R M O N VII.

GAL. v. 13.

*Brëthren, ye have been called unto liberty,
only use not liberty for an occasion to
the flesh, but by love serve one another.* 151

S E R M O N VIII.

PSALM xxxvii. 7.

*Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for
him: fret not thyself because of him
who prospereth in his way.* - 173

S E R M O N

S E R M O N IX.

PSALM xix. 12, 13.

*Who can understand his errors? Cleanse
thou me from secret faults. Keep back
thy servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me; then
I shall be upright, and be innocent from
the great transgression.* — 203

S E R M O N X.

HOSEA, vi. 3.

*Then shall we know if we follow on to know
the Lord.* — — 231

S E R M O N XI.

ROM. xiv. 17.

*For the kingdom of God is not meat and
drink, but righteousness, and peace, and
joy in the Holy Ghost.* — 265

S E R M O N

CONTENTS.

xi

S E R M O N XII.

MATT. v. 3.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is
the kingdom of Heaven.* — 285

S E R M O N XIII.

MATT. vi. 31, 32.

*Therefore take no thought, saying, What
shall we eat, or what shall we drink,
or wherewithal shall we be clothed? For
after all these things do the Gentiles seek;
for your heavenly Father knoweth that
ye have need of all these things.* 305

S E R M O N XIV.

JAMES iii. 13.

*Who is a wise man and endued with know-
ledge among you? let him shew out of a
good conversation his works with meekness
of wisdom.* — — 329

S E R M O N

S E R M O N XV.

COL. iii. 13.

Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another. If any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. — — 349

S E R M O N XVI.

ECCLES. viii. xi.

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily; therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. — — 381

S E R M O N S.

S E R M O N S.

S E R M O N I.

I COR. X. 31.

Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

THE All-wise Being who formed us, and gave us freedom and intelligence, has seldom met with those returns of duty and gratitude which his loving-kindness has deserved. Being himself not an object of sense, and but dimly seen in his works by the eye of reason, he has left mankind in general to collect what notices they could of his existence and attributes, with-

VOL. I.

B

out

out making them any otherwise accountable for the success than rational creatures must necessarily be for every abuse of their reason. He beheld with pity and compassion, as far as those affections are applicable to the Deity, the weak and uncertain conceptions that were formed of him; and was not offended at the sincere, but rude endeavours of his creatures to please him. Under the Mosaic dispensation, while many false gods were contending with the great Jehovah for power and precedence, it is not surprizing that the Jews should be inclined to represent him as literally jealous of his authority and honours. Men could hardly persuade themselves that the great object of their worship could be so indifferent as not to be moved by the wrongs and indignities offered to him; or that he could see without real passion and jealousy the allegiance due

due to him transferred to creatures and idols. And indeed, in the notions of the Divine attributes that prevailed among the Israelites, who interpreted too literally the figurative expressions of the scriptures, nothing is more remarkable than the character of jealousy; and so far there were grounds for it, that every departure from his worship was punished with a severity that seemed to proceed from resentment.

This opinion was farther encouraged in the Jewish nation, by their having been sometimes employed to execute the Divine vengeance on their wicked and idolatrous neighbours. They easily thought that they could not manifest more effectually their zeal for God's honour than by punishing his enemies. And under the Christian dispensation, when men were left to the sole influence of their consciences, without the terror of temporal

punishment, yet the same notions continued for some time, and have been too often revived. Our Saviour indeed manifested on the very first occasion the different genius of the doctrine he taught, by checking his disciples, who, no doubt, thought to pay their court to him by calling down fire from heaven, with that severe reproof, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." Indeed nothing could be more superfluous and unnecessary than this kind of glory to the All-sufficient Being to whom they offered it, who, perhaps in the universe, is the only intelligent Being who can receive no advantage from the respect and homage of any part of the creation. His happiness consists in the exercise and enjoyment of his own attributes. His power and majesty and wisdom will be the same, whether we take notice of them or no. If we let the
works

works of his hands pass by us unobserved, we shall lose the light and improvement which such contemplations give to our minds. If we consider not the conduct of his providence, and the different treatment which good and bad men meet with from the constitution of nature, we shall form no conceptions of the justice which he is constantly exercising, nor of the tender mercies which are over all his works. And if we do not make ourselves acquainted with the true character of our heavenly Father, by considering the wisdom and design of his creation, we shall leave ourselves exposed to the impostures of false prophets, and shall attain no clear knowledge of that part of his will, which is to be the measure of our own duty and obedience.

Thus you see that the acknowledgment of God's glory tends ultimately not to his

advantage but our own. But all these points are made clear in the last and best revelation which God has most graciously vouchsafed to us. The different parts of the creation advance his glory, by performing their respective offices, and concurring to constitute the order and wisdom of the whole. Even inanimate things have their share in this great operation. It is thus that "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work." And rational and intelligent beings contribute in like manner to the same great end, when they act with truth and steadiness, according to the principles of their nature. "Hereby is my Father glorified," saith our Saviour, "that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples."

Here we see, that to glorify God under
the

the gospel, is to pay him that obedience which the gospel requires. St. Paul, writing to the Philippians, says, " I pray
" that your love may abound more and
" more; that ye may be sincere, and
" without offence, being filled with the
" fruits of righteousness; which are, by
" Christ Jesus, unto the glory and praise
" of God." From hence it is evident, that, in the Apostle's sense, we then advance the glory and praise of God, when we abound more and more in love; when we are sincere, and without offence; and when we are filled with the fruits of righteousness. And nature and reason suggest to us the same doctrine that is given in the scriptures.

In strictness of expression, the glory of God is the manifestation of himself to his creatures; particularly to those beings who are able to discern the traces of his wisdom.

They may contribute to the manifestation of his glory, by communicating to their fellow-creatures the wonders of goodness and wisdom which they discover; but chiefly by paying obedience to his will, and manifesting the excellence of the law they live under, and the wisdom of their great Law-giver, by the good effects it produces in their lives and manners.

In what remains to be said upon this subject, we shall consider some of the cases in which the doctrine thus explained is applicable to different branches of our duty. The Apostle employs it in the text as a fit principle to regulate our behaviour with regard to the religious prejudices of pious, well-meaning men at Corinth: and he applies it to the disputes concerning the lawfulness of eating the heathen sacrifices. Meat that had been offered to idols was not thereby altered in its natural qualities, nor made different from

from other aliments of the same kind. And when it was sold in the market, it seems to have been removed from the superstitious purposes to which it had been dedicated; at least it was so with regard to those who professed to use it only as common food. Yet there were among the Corinthians good men of scrupulous minds, who thought it idolatry to taste these meats, and almost as wicked to converse with those who used them. Now, to men of clearer understandings, who could estimate these things according to their real value, the advice given by the Apostle is not to ridicule the niceties and scruples of their weak brethren, nor to triumph in their own superior discernment; but “ whether ye eat
“ or drink, or whatever ye do, do all
“ to the glory of God.—Give no offence,
“ neither to the Jew nor to the Gentile,
“ nor

“ nor to the church of God.—Even as I
“ please men in all things, not seeking
“ my own profit, but the profit of many,
“ that they may be saved.” St. Paul
never expressed a sentiment more truly
worthy of his divine mission. In treating
the infirmities of our nature with this
candour and condescension, there is a
humane and rational tenderness which I
could almost say does honour to revela-
tion. What could he have gained by op-
posing this harmless error, and insisting
rigidly on truths of little consequence?
He would have alienated the minds he
wished to conciliate to him; he would
have given bad impressions of his doc-
trine and his principles, and thereby have
rendered himself less able to carry on
that great work intrusted to his charge—
the propagation of the gospel; that is,
less able to promote the glory of God.

Indeed

Indeed religion is a matter of the most serious nature, and all men are strongly prejudiced in favour of their own profession. They justly expect, therefore, to be treated with so much regard as to have no contempt or ridicule cast in their presence upon what they esteem to be sacred.

Now it must frequently happen, since numbers of men can never think entirely alike, that they may differ in little things, even where they agree in essentials. If they could be brought to consider these little things as what they are, as in their own nature indifferent, all would be well. But nothing will ever be considered as indifferent which men make a part of their religion. These considerations seem to lay us under a necessity of treating the faith, and the forms of worship which other men profess, with decency and respect. It were to be wished, indeed, that
all

all religious differences might be discussed in calm conferences by honest and disinterested men. The wise would then instruct the ignorant; errors and prejudices would vanish of themselves, from the mere habit of perceiving truth; and, the rubbish of superstition being removed, we should clearly behold the strong foundations on which faith and righteousness stand. But as so much moderation is not to be expected from the characters that are commonly met with, perhaps the best kind of behaviour in general between such as differ in points of faith, consists in silence and mutual forbearance.

A second method I shall mention of promoting the glory of God is, to avoid all unjustifiable practices, which may lead men to suspect the sincerity of our religious principles. Bad men live in a perpetual contradiction to this rule. The whole

whole course of their lives convinces their neighbours how little they have the interests of religion at their hearts. But then this is what those who know them expect; and their influence is the less, as their conduct is acknowledged to be utterly unjustifiable. But when men of sober and regular characters betray, upon some occasions, a disregard to the most important duties, the minds of others, particularly of their inferiors, are too apt to be seduced by the authority of an example; which, in other instances, has appeared worthy of their imitation. Sometimes it happens that men, from the pardonable infirmities of nature, are unable to persist in the constant exercise of their duty; but disgrace themselves by deviating suddenly from the paths of virtue, which they have long followed, and to which they gladly return. Some are mere hypocrites,

hypocrites, who are either forced to take off the mask, or calmly lay it aside, when the ends for which it was worn are answered. In both which cases religion itself is too apt to partake of the disgrace that falls upon her unworthy followers. But that which shows in the strongest light the weak and precarious authority which religion is able to maintain over mankind is, the constant course of their behaviour on public occasions, when interest and duty lead different ways. In these cases, not only the thoughtless, the licentious, and the profligate, but the grave, the temperate, and the wise, rather chuse to follow the allurements of profit, and justify their practice by their example, than a contrary conduct, which has nothing but the approbation of conscience to recommend it. It is strange to observe to what lengths this species of licensed wickedness

wickedness is carried, and how men are infected with it who have lost their relish for every motive that might be pleaded in their excuse, who are indifferent to common pleasures and enjoyments; who have no inclination to spend, and sometimes no family to inherit the fortunes which they have received as the price of their characters and their consciences. It is an unprofitable turn of mind, which it is neither just nor safe to indulge, to think meanly of human nature, which, with all its imperfections, is still the work of God. But perhaps there are some temptations superior to the powers which are commonly given to resist them; at least where the appointed means have not been used to obtain that grace which is sufficient for us. It certainly requires a great strength of mind to reject and disdain what the world most covets and admires: and yet they

they who have had the courage to stand the consequences of such a behaviour, have not entirely lost their reward, or found it very considerably lessened.

By thus promoting the glory of God, they have most effectually established their own. They have acquired that valuable part of human honour which liveth in the memory of men; and even in this life fadeth not away. Nor are they totally excluded from the temporary profits and advantages which they appeared to abandon, and certainly did not contend for. "There is a time for all things under the sun;" and it sometimes happens in the revolutions of human affairs, that there is a time for virtue: a time when it shall appear necessary to employ it, and becoming to reward it.

The third and last instance I shall mention, whereby we are said to promote the
glory

glory of God, is by acknowledging his righteousness and providence, and the justice of his dealings with the sons of men.]

It is natural for those who feel inconveniences from some particular part of nature, and whose minds have not been attentive to the proofs of general wisdom and design, to find fault and murmur at Providence for permitting the evils by which they suffer. But these objections will appear selfish and insignificant to him who has been used to contemplate the divine mechanism and contrivance that appears even in the meanest performances of nature, as far as he is capable of examining them. He will easily take for granted, that the wisdom which is so manifest in what he sees and judges of, is not less real in other cases where the design is not so obvious; he will be satisfied that the rough and portentous scenes of nature have very

important uses, and serve the purposes of the Most High : not only the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work ; but fire and hail-storm, and tempest, do also fulfil his word.

With the same submission to the wisdom of God's administration, he will acknowledge that, to a mind able to trace the consequence of things, the evils of this life are, in many instances, the most substantial blessings that are bestowed upon us. Thus pain is evidently intended as a necessary admonition to warn us of the approach of danger. Thus, poverty and misfortunes, by forcing the mind to exert her powers, and to gather strength and hardiness by exercise, become the frequent, and almost natural, sources of talents and reputation. It is not among the sons of wealth and titles that we must look
for

for the great improvers of science, or the deliverers of their country. Even sickness and confinement, when rightly received and submitted to, have their use, as they furnish matter for reflection, suspend the progress of vice, and give time for reason and repentance to work a cure.

From these considerations, and from the general view of life, it is evident that God does not pamper and indulge his favourite sons, but treats them with a kind of fatherly severity; and it also appears that the true happiness of life does not swim upon the surface in superficial finery and show; but sinks deep; is often interwoven with labour and pain, and is the slow result of patience and self-government.

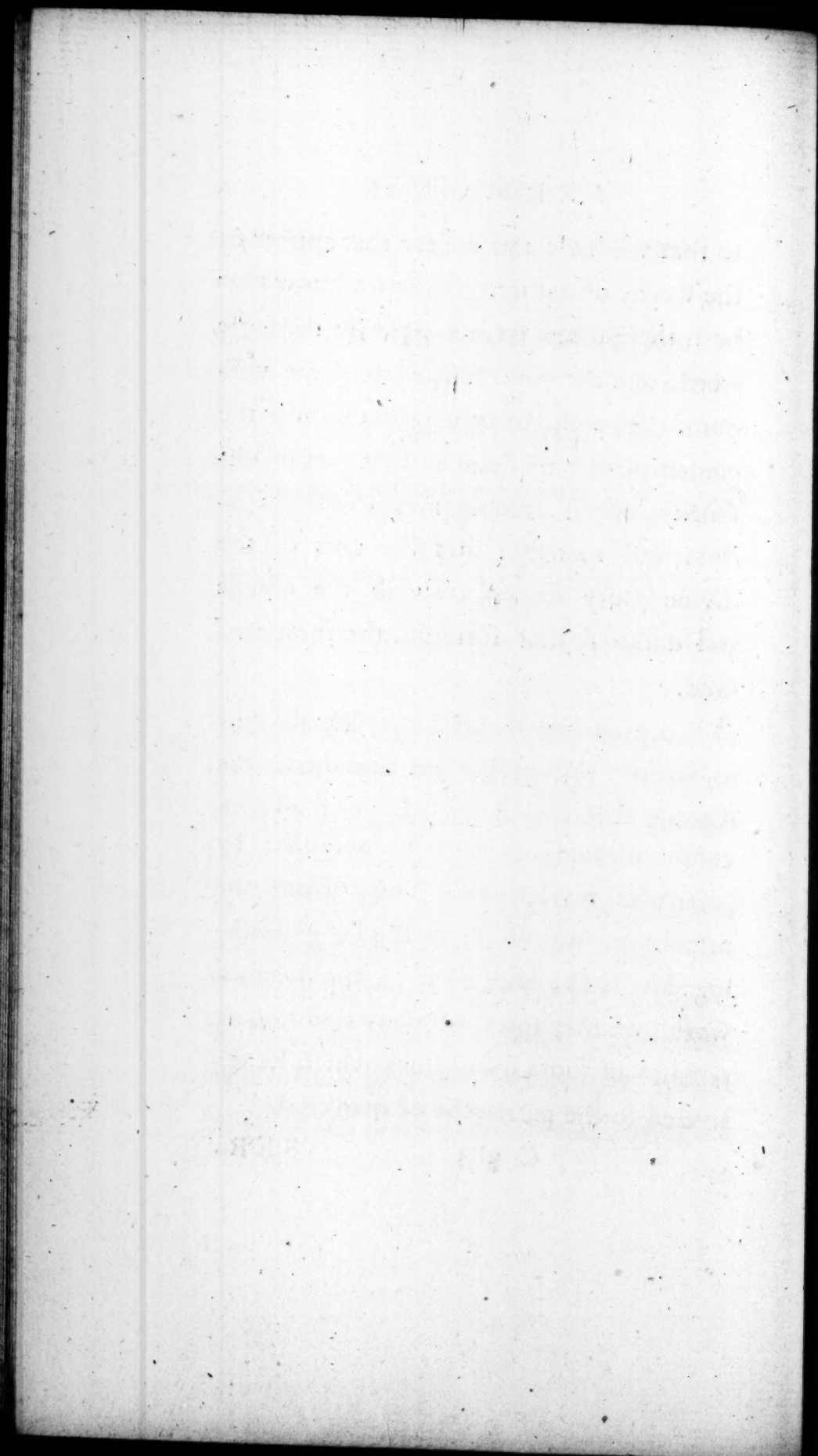
When we are advanced thus far in vindicating the justice, which is the true glory of God, it is but a step farther to

allow the equitable distribution of what are called the goods of fortune ; for if the hardships of life are often found to be of the most real service to men in forming their minds to humanity, and in exercising their virtues ; and, on the other hand, when God bestows riches and affluence on the unworthy, as he frequently only gives them the means of disgracing themselves, and of increasing their guilt and their punishment, who can say, that in these cases, we have any reason to consider them as the peculiar objects of his favour. It is no more than reasonable to expect that the conduct of the Almighty should be such as the meanest of his creatures cannot easily comprehend.

In the different characters and situations of life, and in the different proportions with which good and bad fortune are allotted to us, there is something analogous

to

to that wildness and variety that appear in the works of nature. Now we know that both these scenes were created by the same word, and are governed by the same wisdom. The obscurity we meet with in the contemplation of them is that sort of obscurity which accompanies exalted wisdom and majesty; but the rays of the divine glory stream through the clouds and darkness that surround the throne of God.



S E R M O N II.

HEB. i. 1, 2.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the Prophets, hath, in these last days, spoken unto us by his Son.

AS a proper introduction to dispose men to receive the gospel he preached, the Apostle observes, that God had in all ages communicated his will to mankind by particular revelations. This, from the beginning, was God's method of publishing his laws; and even in the heathen world, we may trace out many traditionary remains of those institutions which he delivered to the patriarchs of mankind.

But the family to whom this epistle is immediately addressed, which Providence had chosen for the appearance of that person by whom the last declaration of his will was to be made, he was careful to keep in a constant dependance on his authority, by a continued series of revelation. The Apostle, in the text, asserts the fact, that there has been such a one derived down through all ages, and at last sealed up and perfected in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If we can prove the necessity of admitting some divine revelation, his general assertion will stand clear of all difficulty, and the Christian revelation, in particular, which he offers to us, will have a right to be considered with attention. This we shall attempt, by shewing that nothing but the credit and authority of a divine revelation could establish a uniform rule of
moral

moral virtue among mankind. That there is a God, is, by the nature of the question, an acknowledged principle amongst those who dispute whether he has made any discovery of his will: and the attributes of wisdom, justice, goodness, and providence, employed in that idea, oblige us to conclude he is concerned for the happiness of his creatures, and has made a suitable provision for it; and it is a consequence, arising hence, that the happiness and perfection of every creature must consist in acting according to the will and intention of the Creator. His will is the proper law of every being throughout his dominion; and, to a free and intelligent being, this will must be published, be open to his notice, lie before him as a rule, and be recommended, by suitable motives, to his observance. Now, it is evident that both the public and private happiness

happiness of mankind depend on their conduct towards one another; in other words, on a mutual practice of moral virtue. We must therefore conclude, that it is the will of God that these virtues should obtain, in general, observance, and, consequently, they must be proposed to the general notice of men, and enforced by motives sufficient to induce their practice. That a divine revelation is both the fullest and most compendious provision to direct men to the knowledge of that rule, and the most effectual to engage and unite them in the observance of it, is apparent.

But it is pretended by some that God never made any such revelation, but left all mankind to collect the rule and motives of their actions from the sole use of those faculties he has given them. Let us see, then, what a rule of morality is like to prevail upon this supposition.

We

We may fairly presume that human reason has been the same in all former ages that it is now ; subject to those weaknesses and imperfections we feel in ourselves and observe in others ; for that it was ever in a state of greater perfection, we learn only from revelation. From this concession, we think it may be proved that natural reason could not be such a direction to moral virtue, and consequently such a provision for the happiness of mankind as the wisdom and goodness of God obliges us to believe he designed for us. For, admitting that some thoughtful persons, of great attention and improvements, might collect as exact and useful a system of moral duties as could be imagined ; yet, unless we could find an expedient to give their conclusions the authority of a general rule, we have proceeded only for the direction of these few ; while the rest of
the

the world, who have neither leisure nor abilities for these speculations, are left to wander in the dark, without any guide and measure of duty. And when we consider the weakness and confusion of vulgar capacities, how unequal they are to abstract enquiries, how irresistibly the various lusts and passions of men will interpose, darken the little light they have, corrupt their judgment, and persuade each to accommodate his rule to their suggestions; what can we expect in the result of this scheme but an utter confusion of all morality.

And since the happiness of men in this life depends not only on each person's own conduct, but on that of others too, even the few wise themselves would find their felicity but ill secured upon this hypothesis; and the general event must be all the misery that folly and passion, let loose upon

upon the world, would naturally produce. If, indeed, the weak, the ignorant, the passionate, would submit to the wise and thoughtful, we might hope for some remedy to those confusions; but what provision is made for this? The state of nature contended for supposes all men equal and independent; none has any right to over-rule the sentiments and persuasions of another; but every man is to think for himself, form his own rule of action, and judge of his own interests.

If it be said that the equity and usefulness of virtue must appear to the meanest understanding, when proposed to his consideration; and, therefore, though inferior capacities might be unable to collect and digest such prescriptions into an uniform rule of practice, yet they would easily receive them, when offered by persons of greater sagacity:

we

we may answer to this, that men are not so ready to submit their understanding to that of others as this expedient supposes. The weakest capacities are often more conceited of their parts, and more tenacious of their conclusions, than the best. We have known the greatest absurdities in morality asserted; even the distinction of good and evil reversed, by persons who have, at the same time, thought themselves superior to the rest of the world, by the accuracy of their reasoning, and the depth of their penetration.

If men had no passions, or no satisfaction in gratifying them, the reason of the wise might hope for some attention and authority. But the fact is quite otherwise. Men are led by strong appetites to vicious pleasures and interests, which obscure the evidence, and over-rule the convictions

victions of truth. Even the wise themselves are not secure from their delusion; and how much more must they prevail among the weak and thoughtless? And, if even the arguments of religion are often found too weak, how irresistibly would they bear down the mere persuasions of philosophy? We do not say that justice, temperance, and other moral virtues, may not be proved, to sober and dispassionate reason, to be the proper interest and duty of man. They certainly are so; and when viewed with a clear and impartial eye, and in a proper light, must appear to be so. But we say, that it is vain to expect that the generality of men will ever be governed by sober and dispassionate reason; and, therefore, a scheme, whose success depends upon so groundless a supposition, must be given up as chimerical. If every man were left to collect his own rule of action,

without

without the awe or direction of any authority, pleasure would be one man's reason, and avarice another's; every one's governing passion would be his reason.

Such are the reasons to whose conduct mankind must be left, if we take away the light and authority of a revelation. And if we would argue justly upon the case before us, we must consider what sort of morality these reasons would produce. Consider human reason, then, as it is in fact, modified by the various disabilities, passions, and prejudices which will ever prevail among the greater part of mankind. Consider every man left, without rule or guide, in this wild, disconcerted state, to search out truth and happiness by his own collections, and what distractions and perplexities must they run into; what dissonant, interfering schemes of morality must be produced? how irreconcilable

cileable to each other, how inconsistent with public, and consequently with private happiness? With this view before us, can we imagine any thing so desirable, so suitable to the wants of human nature, as that God should interpose; by an authoritative declaration of his will, enlighten the darkness, and compose the dissensions of men, and unite them under a rule of action, which the character of the Author must recommend to universal reverence and submission? Even he who transgressed such a direction, must confess his own folly, and still acknowledge the law to be holy, and just, and good.

In short, if the social happiness of mankind depends on a general practice of moral virtue; if this can never obtain but by a general acknowledgment of some common rule; if no such rule could ever prevail but by the prescription of some authority to

which all would submit; and if the authority of God alone could effectually engage such a submission, his goodness will oblige us to conclude that he would signify his will, and not suffer his creatures to want such a necessary provision for their happiness. Under this supposition, what a different face of things appears to us! How effectually is every disorder calmed, ignorance enlightened, and every passion brought into subjection by the authority of infinite wisdom, justice, and power!

So far as the conduct of a voluntary Agent can be influenced by the most venerable direction, and the most powerful motives of action, we have here the utmost provision that can be made, or even conceived, for the order, virtue, and happiness of mankind. We have therefore reason to bless God who has called us to the knowledge of his will, by a pure and holy
revelation

revelation derived down to us through a long succession of ages, and at last completed in its full light and perfection by the gospel of Jesus Christ. A rule worthy the wisdom of its Author, fitted for the direction of every relation, office, or condition of life, and equally conducive to the happiness of all. The Prince is here taught how to govern, and the subject how to obey. The rich and the powerful are prescribed those virtues which will procure them honour and esteem; and the poor such returns of gratitude as will secure to them favour, support, and protection. The insolence of the one and the envy of the other, every provoking and disquieting passion, are put under discipline and restraint; and the various ranks and orders of men are enjoined such a mutual exchange of services, as will endear them to each other, and spread cheerfulness and

pleasure through human society. And to the whole system of these beneficial duties we are engaged by all the motives that can be offered to the reason, or influence the hopes and fears of an intelligent nature.

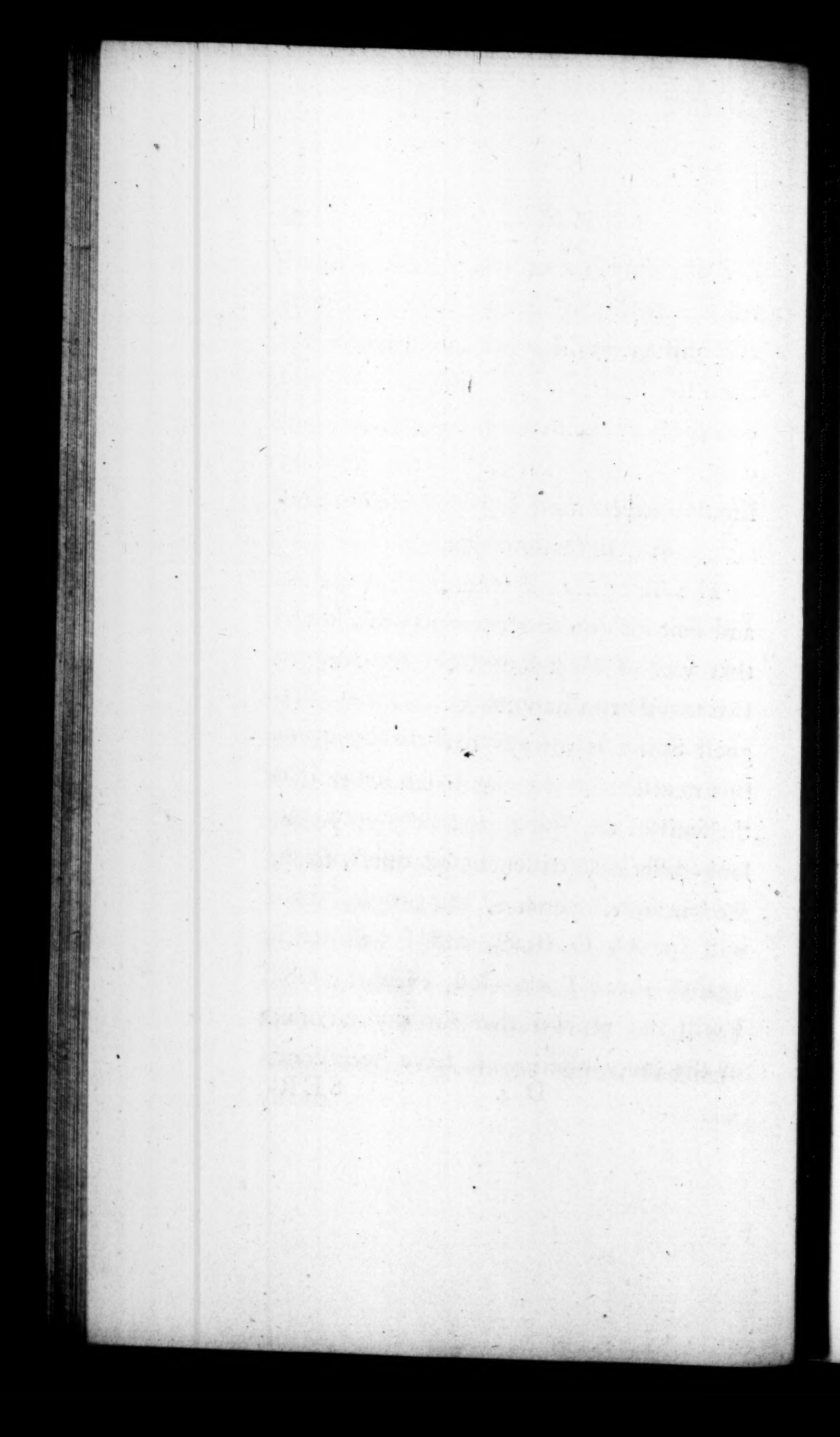
If we add to this, that besides the light revealed to us in the holy Scriptures, by which our reason is informed, and our notions of duty rendered more clear and comprehensive, that the Spirit of God is always ready to enlighten our minds, and to assist our sincere endeavours; there seems nothing wanting on the part of Heaven which good men can wish for. This gracious communication between the Holy Spirit and the mind of man is a blessing which those who are best acquainted with the wants and weaknesses of human nature will always set the highest value upon. Indeed, without these divine succours,

succours, how can we hope to pass, with innocence and safety, through the temptations and dangers that beset our lives? Men, in all times, have felt the want of this supernatural aid, and have always flattered themselves, according to their various systems of religion, that the gods whom they worshipped would watch over and protect them. In this hope and confidence, they have gone through the severest trials, and performed those great actions which have done honour to their species. But, amongst the heathen, these honours were supposed to be confined to a few, to the prophets and heroes, who excelled and instructed their fellow-creatures. But the religion given to us by our Saviour, admits not of these invidious distinctions. Every sincere Christian who offers up his prayers to the Throne of Grace, may be sure to receive those gifts

of the Spirit, which the Divine Wisdom shall judge to be most suitable to his wants. How these gifts are conveyed to us, we are not concerned to enquire. All the works of nature are carried on by ways that we are better qualified to admire, or at most to guess at, than to comprehend. Even the common train of our own thoughts passes through our minds, in a succession that is neither ordered by us nor under our command. Many causes there are that call up things to our memory, without our being able to account for it. The Holy Spirit, unperceived by us, may easily suggest such notions and views of things as may influence our whole understandings, and implant new principles of life and action. It is our business to yield and accommodate ourselves to those gracious influences, which may work an almost immediate change in our nature, and render

der our duty not only easy but delightful. And let us always remember that the assistance which we are to hope for from the Spirit of God is that which encourages and facilitates the performance of duty. We must not expect that Heaven should interest itself to propagate our opinions, or maintain our quarrels.

The Almighty Father created us at first, and sent his Son to redeem us, to the end that we, as his adopted children, might live together in happiness and love. His good Spirit is always ready to promote this excellent work; and remember that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.



S E R M O N III.

PSALM I. 21.

*Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such
a one as thyself.*

IN this psalm God is described, under very lofty ideas and magnificent language, as coming to pass judgment upon mankind. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people. "Gather my saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt-offerings to have been continually

nually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goat out of thy folds." Ritual obedience is what God neither wants nor delights in; "but offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows to the Most High." Our heavenly Father thought this a necessary caution even for his saints, not to rest too much on ceremonies and external duty; and, indeed, this is a weakness which good men are too easily susceptible of. But, to the wicked, God saith, "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth; seeing thou hatest instruction and castest my words behind thee? When thou sawest a thief thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers."

After mentioning several other crimes which complete a vicious character, the Spirit of God points out to us that evil principle

principle from whence they chiefly proceed, and with which they are commonly joined: “Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself.” The attributing human imperfections to the divine nature is the principal cause of error and superstition in religious persons, and of abandoned wickedness in sinners. Nothing is more evident than that if we act up to our principles, our practice must necessarily follow the notions we entertain of God. He is the observer and judge of our lives. His will is the acknowledged law of our actions, and his will is determined by his character. If he be arbitrary or severe, fond of trifles, or indulgent to vice, his law must unavoidably partake of the same qualities.

It is also certain that we must draw our conceptions of the divine attributes chiefly from what we observe in ourselves and our
own

own species. Other beings may give us a view of strength and power, and an infinite variety of natural qualities; but where shall we find the impressions of reason and truth, the sense of justice, mercy, and wisdom? These are privileges by which God most graciously distinguished the children of men, when he formed them after his own image. If we perceived no traces of them in our own minds; if we were not so formed as necessarily to admit such perceptions, we could never acknowledge any resemblance of them in the works of nature, we could never comprehend the noble representations of God in the holy scriptures: to our ears they would be sounds without a meaning. We ought to think with all honour and reverence of the Most High. It is possible he may have excellencies not only superior in degree, but in kind, to whatever we can imagine: but
our

our understandings can only reach to a faint apprehension of those perfections of which we can discover some inferior resemblance and imitation in the works of his hands, and chiefly in our own nature. And if we are careful to attribute nothing to the divine nature but what constitutes the dignity and perfection of our own, making always all possible allowances for our weak and defective imaginations, our notions of God will be just, as far as they reach; they will be sufficient to answer our present purposes, to discover so much of his pure and perfect will as relates to ourselves, and to improve that heavenly likeness in which we were formed, into a nearer image of his holiness. This we should infallibly do, if we were not too much influenced by our ungovernable appetites. Man is a confused mixture of thought and passion, sense and fancy, desire
fire

fire and reason; qualities that seldom unite and agree, enter into his composition. There is, besides, an original disorder and depravity in his very frame; and, if he is not upon his guard, the corruption is perpetually increasing. Custom inures him to ill, and example seems to justify it; pleasure seduces his passions, and interest corrupts his judgment: nor is he forward to oppose this dangerous bias to evil; on the contrary, the greater part have, in all ages, basely yielded to it. And hence, by neglect and voluntary delusion, they have impaired the powers of reason, grown indifferent to truth, and dishonest and insincere in the search of it, studiously confounding the measures of right and wrong, defacing the original resemblance of the Deity imprest upon their mind, and wickedly forming, in its stead, most unlike and injurious representations

presentations of him. It is indeed impossible it should be otherwise; for when men, in such circumstances, endeavour, from themselves, to frame such conceptions of the Supreme Being, they draw after a spurious pattern: the production will resemble its object, and the glory of the incorruptible God be changed into an image made like to corruptible man. How far this corruption may possibly be carried, may be seen, in its full extent, in the practice of the heathen world. They transferred every vice and weakness that disgraces human nature to the objects of their worship; they gave them human forms, and, to some of them, even bodily imperfections and deformities. One might imagine, indeed, that the Christian dispensation, which exhibits to man the justest and clearest, the most amiable and exalted view of his Maker, would have
been

been sufficient effectually to banish these delusions, and to prevent them for the future: and it has actually produced very evident and considerable effects, as great as the abandoned ignorance and obstinate wickedness of the world would admit of.

But there is always a strange blindness and fatality ordained to be the wages of sin. It seems to be a settled law of Providence, that they who will be wicked must be ignorant: hence it is that the light of the gospel was, for many ages, in a manner extinguished. The idea of God, the first source of religion, and true foundation of virtue, was obscured and defaced. Doctrines were recorded of him that contradicted all his perfections; actions imputed to him, that even a good man would disown; and arbitrary, tyrannical, and capricious injunctions represented as the laws of Divine Wisdom. Pictures,

tures, and bodily representations of him that inhabiteth eternity, are yet frequent among some Christians; of him, who says of himself, in his holy word, “To whom
“will ye liken God, or what likeness
“will ye compare to him.” And even among those of a purer profession, who have been better taught, and seem to have good intentions, there is too often discoverable some secret leaven of this unrighteousness. Many, who readily assent to the divine attributes in general, do yet retain some private opinions destructive of them. In some cases the force of reason and scripture is willingly acknowledged; in others they are counterworked by the inveterate prejudices that prevail over their conduct, and the inconsistency is not perceived. For, as was observed before, the powers of long habit, of early principles, and settled passions, are perpetually work-

ing on our minds. They insinuate into matters from whence they ought to be totally excluded, and infect our most serious and retired contemplations. These operating in various manners upon different tempers and understandings, must necessarily produce a great diversity of sentiments dishonourable to God. We shall chuse two of them for the present subject of our meditation, because they are the most remarkable, and because they seem to include whatever is most considerable in the rest. The first is that which represents God as an arbitrary, severe, inexorable Being, rather compelling his creatures by might and terror, than winning them by reason and goodness. The second exhibits him under a contrary appearance; as indolent and careless of his creation, indifferent to right and wrong, hardly thinking our behaviour worth his notice.

When

When any man thinks he believes in God, without attending at the same time to those perfections and excellences which constitute the true and real notion of God, he deceives himself with that empty fallacy of putting words for things ; and, instead of placing his religion in obeying the commands of the true Governor of the Universe, by the practice of all holiness, righteousness, and virtue, he will be apt to content himself with worshipping he knows not what, and he knows not how, with a blind superstition, without understanding, and without any real improvement in goodness. The religion of such men usually consists more in an useless amazement of mind, than in any real practice of virtue ; than which nothing can be more dishonourable to God, or more injurious to religion. For, if a wise and good man had rather his name should

not be mentioned at all, than that there should be joined with it a character contrary to wisdom and goodness; much more must it needs be unacceptable to God that men should frame of him such notions as are not honourable to him, and serve him with such a religion as is of no true benefit to them. This, perhaps, no one ever did in the whole, but numbers continually do it in particulars. When men revile and injure those of a different profession; when they conceive disgust, think ill of, and shun society and communion with all such as cannot think like themselves, no doubt they imagine that God has the same notion of things as they have; but, then, must they not imagine him to judge of men by accident and opinion, and to act, as it were, in the spirit and principles of a party. Some discover nothing in their religion but terror and melancholy;

lancholy; whether from an unfortunate bias to these passions, or from the injudicious instruction of their youth, many good men waste their days in mourning, and make their duty the burthen of their lives. They cannot attend to that great and comfortable truth, which the voice of nature and of God continually declares to us—That the sole intent of his laws is the happiness of his creation. They seem to think it suitable to his omnipotence to exert an arbitrary government, and extort from his subjects a tribute of fruitless obedience. Thus, not understanding the true purpose of the divine commands; not sufficiently distinguishing between that which is essential to religion, and that which is only useful and instrumental, they come to think of ceremonies and positive institutions, as equal, or superior, in value to that intrinsic virtue they are de-

signed to promote ; hence they are unhappily liable to confound the nature and notions of moral duties, either by rashly extending, or selfishly restraining them ; by applying them to improper or frivolous objects ; or by transferring the venerable name of Virtue to some human imperfection.

In the common business of the world much candour and consideration is requisite, in order to act with innocence. Justice is often involved in intricacies : we must distinguish between equity and rigid right ; and be careful that prudence never incroaches upon humanity. Now, if that genuine and immutable rule of action, which is solely founded in a similitude to the divine reason and benevolence, remains unknown, all these duties, so important to human society, must seem unsettled and obscure ; and the comforts and tranquillity they

they tend to produce, must alter and decline in proportion. We come into the world with a large share of selfishness (perhaps in that consists the greatest part of our original corruption), and it increases daily amongst immoderate pleasures and corrupt examples. If there is nothing in our religion that requires us to love our brethren, and use them well, and there can be nothing in it of that sort if there are no marks of goodness and kindness in the supreme pattern of our imitation, then it will be possible to be very pious and very uncharitable ; very devout and very unjust. And, where the rule of action is not strictly determined, there must be great encouragement for insincerity and self-deception to exert themselves ; to corrupt our manners by tainting our principles. But, at best, how spiritless and servile must that obedience necessarily be, which is

paid by a rational creature to a Being whom he conceives to be only superior to him by his unlimited power, but in other respects capricious and arbitrary ; rather jealous of his sovereignty, than delighting in the happiness of his subjects ! To obey laws, without apprehending their use or end, is the part of animals that follow sense and instinct : to submit to might and terror, is the character of slaves : but they are both unworthy of man, whom nature has made free and intelligent. And indeed it is a very constrained and unnatural disposition that those gloomy ways of thinking are apt to form in the most sincere persons. For, as they entertain no grateful nor honourable conceptions of God, their piety terminates in cheerless apprehensions, and a dark astonishment concerning him. They suspect that something is always deficient in their practice ;
that

that some part of his will is neglected or unknown; and they think so injuriously of our most merciful Judge as to fear that he will not accept their utmost endeavours. They see him only as a jealous and avenging God, that keeps a strict watch over human infirmities, and never spares when they deserve punishment. These notions, in the degree they prevail, must alienate their hearts from true virtue and usefulness; must banish moderation and benevolence from their minds, and leave them only a constrained and imperfect piety. For, as long as they esteem religion a severe task imposed by arbitrary will, notwithstanding their utmost professions of humility and resignation, they cannot but wish themselves exempted from it. They must hate the yoke that oppresses; they may come to wish there was no such thing as duty; no government,

no

no Governor, in the universe. Even in the midst of their spiritual exercises, which, if duly performed, are the peace and refreshment of our souls, they can only raise themselves to a higher sense of the terror that hangs over them. They may profess to admire and adore the Almighty; they may labour to persuade themselves they love him; but in vain: their hearts must give them the lie. Human nature is stubborn and unalterable in this respect: it can never love nor esteem what appears to be neither amiable nor worthy. The utmost they can arrive at is that timorous, abject, and dishonest obedience which slaves and flatterers pay to tyrants. But is this a worship that can be held acceptable to our most righteous and merciful Creator? To him who searcheth our hearts, and understandeth our thoughts afar off! Would not a good man rather
chuse

chuse to be quite unknown, than to appear under so disadvantageous a character; to be quite neglected, than to be served with so injurious a submission? It is true, there are many passages in the Scriptures where the fear of God is strongly enjoined, not only as a necessary part, but as the sum and substance of righteousness. The fear of the Lord is declared to be wisdom; by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil; and we are commanded to perfect holiness in the fear of God. But, then, there are also many passages where love is admitted to an equal privilege. We are indispensibly obliged to love the Lord with all our hearts, and to direct our hearts in the love of God. We should compare one place with others on the same subject; for the sense of Scripture is not the sense of one single text, distinct from the rest, but the result of all considered together: and yet
there

there are many particular passages, which, even separately, might be sufficient to obviate all mistakes on this head. “ Serve “ the Lord with fear,” says the Psalmist ; but it follows that we should “ rejoice with “ trembling.” It is said of the churches of Judea that they “ walked in the fear “ of the Lord ;” but then it is added, that they also “ walked in the comfort of the “ Holy Ghost.” Let them now “ that fear “ the Lord say that his mercy endureth “ for ever,” are the words of David, who would never separate the fear of divine power from the acknowledgement of his goodness. From the comparison of these texts, it is evident, that the fear of God implies no servile nor terrifying apprehensions of him, but that serious awe and veneration which is due to transcendent excellences, and, most of all, to goodness. “ There is mercy with thee, O Lord, “ therefore

“ therefore shalt thou be feared.” It would have been well if all sincere Christians had been constantly attentive to these gracious truths. It would have eased their hearts of much melancholy ; it would have made them more serviceable and acceptable to men, and have given no pretence to the scoffers to blaspheme their holy profession. Abandoned sinners are never better pleased than when good men appear in a ridiculous light ; they are ready to take advantage of all their weakness in practice, and mistakes in principles ; for if they can discover any excessive strictness or formality in religion, it is thought a sufficient vindication of the more dangerous and vicious excesses which they indulge in a contrary way. For, notwithstanding all that has been said, there is certainly less danger in conceiving anxious and dismal apprehensions of the Almighty, than in thinking of him

him lightly and loosely, without any respect at all. This was the second false opinion we proposed to treat of, which considers God as in a manner indolent, and careless of his creation, indifferent to right and wrong, hardly thinking our behaviour worth his notice.

There are many hurtful notions that secretly work upon the dispositions and govern the conduct of men, which they would be so far from owning to others, that perhaps they are not distinctly known to their own minds. It would be difficult to explain the causes of so strange a delusion. It seems, in general, to proceed from great carelessness and insincerity. But that the thing is fact we cannot doubt, if we diligently observe the behaviour of others, or our own. How many are there who appear in many respects to think rightly enough of religion, that yet have a
strange

strange partiality and indulgence for most unjustifiable practices. There are numbers so perfectly easy, that one would think they were innocent, who yet give into daily luxury and useless expence; who waste their lives in diversions, who delight in immodest and profane conversations, and think themselves perfectly unconcerned in the sufferings of their brethren. Are not all of us apt to think very lightly of the sins we commit ourselves, and the more so the oftener we commit them? Do not we look upon our crimes, that are long past, as in a manner forgotten by the Divine Wisdom, and not to be accounted for? Has not every one the dishonesty, more or less, to misrepresent his worst vices, even to his own conscience, as laudable qualities or natural infirmities? But, in all these instances, do we not plainly corrupt and adulterate the law of God;

God; measuring eternal truth by our changeable fancies, and imputing, in some measure, to our Maker, the same carelessness and prejudice, the same superficial sense of things, we are subject to ourselves? Would men examine their own hearts with sincerity, I doubt they would often find something like this at the bottom of them. But there are some hardened sinners, honest enough, shall I say, or desperate enough, to confess and acknowledge it. Can we think that God will take notice of such trifles? Can we believe that he would deprive us of such pleasures, or punish such infirmities? This is their language. But what are the trifles and infirmities commonly meant? Only such crimes as are expressly prohibited by the divine command, and not less so by reason and the common good; such as the world must necessarily receive prejudice from,

both

both by their bad effects, and their worse example; and yet such things did they imagine, and are deceived, for their own wickedness hath blinded them. Take notice also, that if we think partially or falsely of Religion, we must necessarily think so of him who is the Fountain of Religion. It is inconsistent, and almost impious, to call God holy, and just, and good, if we will not allow his law to be so. His law and will are his true character, the most express image of his eternal mind. When men attempt to disguise their iniquity under mean subterfuges and false pretences; when they hold some degrees of vice and corruption excusable; or some kinds of dishonesty, in certain circumstances, as to serve a friend, or carry on the designs of a party, to be innocent and justifiable; does not this, besides the guilt of the actions themselves, reflect an additional dishonour

on the divine precepts and attributes? It were better to sin openly and avowedly, than to make void the law of truth by our corrupt imaginations; than to labour to involve our Maker in the participation of our crimes. Has he eyes of flesh, or feeth he as man feeth? “My thoughts are
“not your thoughts; neither are your
“ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as
“the heavens are higher than the earth,
“so are my ways higher than your ways,
“and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Righteousness and truth, the great prerogatives of the King of Kings, are in their nature uniform and universal; they despise all pretences; they admit of no variation; they cannot conform to passions, interests, and circumstances; but require and command, with the most just authority, every rational being to conform to them. Bad men may invent evasions,
and

and perplex right and wrong; they may overlook one duty; and compound for another, and explain away a third, and may think this a proof of their superior penetration; but it proceeds, in reality, from a very different and a very dreadful cause: for God hath given them a spirit of slumber; “ eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear.”

And do not imagine that this is one of those extraordinary judgments that are sometimes inflicted on enormous sinners: no, it is the natural and necessary consequence of wickedness; and all natural operations are, in the scripture language, attributed to the Author of Nature. Is it not obvious that all habits, especially evil habits, do insensibly change and bias the understanding? Does not hope and affection alter the appearances of things, and give us partial and confused apprehensions of

them? Have sinners themselves the same sense of their actions while they are committing them, as they have in cool, indifferent hours, when their desires are either satiated or unprovoked? Does not different company, business, and professions, unavoidably introduce different inclinations and ways of thinking? If we chuse to walk in the paths of vice, and converse with sinners, whether we chuse it or no, we shall think like them, and judge like them.

The only way to preserve our reason in its strength and purity, is to preserve our innocence. If once we consent to iniquity, and grow familiar with vice, we are no longer impartial judges of good and evil; we have corrupted the ingenuity and modesty of our natures. Every bad action begets some indisposition to the contrary virtue: men become less skilful to perceive,

ceive, or to do, what is right, when their practice has determined in favour of what is wrong.

On the contrary, if we feel in ourselves a sober, benevolent, and pious disposition, and can prove the goodness of our principles by the genuine fruits of righteousness and good-will to men; if these things are in us, and abound, they will make us that we shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This was the counsel the Apostle St. Peter thought would be most effectual to lead the faithful to the true knowledge of God. He does not advise us, as a preservative against error, to follow blindly the decisions of that church which pretends to derive an authority from him which he never claimed. He does not direct us to attend to obscure

enquiries and nice distinctions, which can only be the province of a few speculative persons; whereas religion is the common business of mankind; but he conjures us, first of all, to be sincere in the practice of universal righteousness, and for the rest we may safely trust to the plain sense of scripture, the reason which God has given us, and the grace he has promised us, which, in such circumstances, will never be wanting. By these we may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

It is by no other method than this, that the saints upon earth, perceiving in their own minds the patterns and traces of every grace and virtue, of those they have attained to, and those they aspire at, behold in this glass the glory of the Lord, and are changed into the same
image

S E R M O N I I I . 71

image from glory to glory ; and it is probable, that by the further improvement and exaltation of these divine qualities, that the angels and blessed spirits are said, in a higher and more excellent sense, to see God face to face.

S E R M O N I V .

GEN. xlv. 1.

Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him ; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me ; and there stood no man with him while Joseph made himself known to his brethren.

IN the Old Testament, in which is preserved, from the beginning of time, the history of the chosen people of God, we meet with few characters more perfect or more amiable than that of Joseph. Exposed and deserted, and even sold for a slave by his brethren, his misfortunes seem to have rendered him the care of Heaven. His virtues and his talents, and
the

the support he felt from above, empowered him to bear, not only the hardships and ill usage of his condition, but disgrace and imprisonment; and to resist the more dangerous temptations of a higher rank. Nothing can give a stronger idea of his merit and abilities, than that, from so mean a beginning, he should raise himself to the administration of public affairs, in the most civilized and intelligent nation then in the world. The behaviour of Joseph to his brethren was perfectly of a piece with his general character; it was kind and generous; it was agreeable to reason and the law of God. He did not revenge, he hardly remembered the cruelties and indignities he had suffered from their envy. As soon as he had made himself known, his first care was to comfort them, and to take away that deep concern and remorse which was visible in their countenances.

He

He invented the kindest excuses in their favour, and chose to interpret the effects of their malice as a necessary compliance with the gracious purposes of Providence.

“ Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you, to preserve life.” There is nothing in all this but what every one who hears must approve.

It was a conduct most suitable to the present circumstances, most likely to reform his brethren, to root up any seeds of malice that might still remain in their hearts, to revive in them a just sense of fraternal duty, and to show, in its strongest light, the superiority of power joined with goodness, over detected and humbled wickedness. But though we acknowledge that the whole action was perfectly conformable to reason and piety, it is no less evident from the narration itself, that if

Joseph

Joseph was prompted by the motives of duty, he was no less prompted by the motives of natural affection; even in the midst of his harsh speeches, while he is sustaining a severe character with care and premeditation, some unguarded word of kindness escapes from him; and we perceive, that nature is working powerfully within, and just ready to prevail. Several times he feels himself unable to contain so painful a dissimulation before the persons who are dearest to him; he cannot bear their presence, and seem indifferent; he is forced to retire and give vent, in private, to his tears of affection. And when he comes, at last, to make the interesting discovery, full of wonder, passion, remorse, and tenderness, he does not appear as acting according to design, but as hurried on, by the confused sentiments of delight and love, into that abrupt but moving

moving exclamation, " I am Joseph.
" Does my father yet live?" Now, what is it that distinguishes this passage of scripture from many others that contain, perhaps, higher examples of piety? What is it that so closely engages and interests us in a story told without art or ornament? It is the lively traces of passion, that simple representation of nature, which corresponds exactly with what we observe and experience in ourselves. Could we suppose that Joseph had felt very little or no affection towards his brethren, he would have behaved, no doubt, as to all essential points, in the same manner, and have acted rightly, from the goodness of his character and the dictates of conscience; and, perhaps, another, with a superior degree of virtue, might have wanted the assistance of temper and disposition, and felt but a trifling effect from those inward propensities

propensities which render the admonitions of duty grateful and easy, and in some cases irresistible. We cannot, therefore, but observe, that natural affection to those of the same family and kindred, contributes very largely to the happiness of the world, as it helps to execute a great number of relative duties which compose a very considerable part of religion. Many kind and beneficent actions are often produced by the strength of this principle, which the cool sentiments of piety, perhaps, could only have suggested.

We have the utmost reason to be grateful to Providence for furnishing us with so useful a supplement to our infirmities, and that a better provision is made for our happiness, than to let it depend entirely on our own merits. It is beyond the power of man to explain by what contrivance or instruments either this or any
other

other passion is first inserted in the constitution; and if we were able to discover it, the subject would rather belong to philosophy than religion. The fact itself is beyond dispute, that where there is affinity of blood, there may commonly be discerned some secret propensity to kindness, some aptness to form and continue friendship, which is not observable, or not so often, among mere strangers. There are, besides, in the common state and circumstances of families, many peculiar properties, which eminently tend to call forth and improve the principles of natural affection.

The first cause by which men are prepared for it, we shall take the liberty to suppose, is the original likeness of temper and constitution, which may be imagined to exist in persons born of the same parents. In the limbs and countenance
this

this resemblance is often strongly evident ; and it seems but reasonable, from the same causes, to expect the same likeness in the features of the mind. I am sensible that the strength of this principle may seem to be invalidated by the exceptions which occur to it in common life, some of which are present to every one's memory. But then the surprise which those instances are always attended with, is a proof that they are only exceptions, and contrary to the general rule and order of nature. On the other side, we meet with many instances in history and common observation, where particular qualities descend from father to son, and appear to have been hereditary. Whole families have continued remarkable, through several ages, for prudence, wit, or bravery ; for a serious or a lively temper. And it is observable, that these resemblances were more apparent, and seem to

to have extended farther in the times of ancient simplicity, when the nations of the earth had little communication with each other, and the different races of mankind were preserved separate and unmixed. May we not reasonably imagine that this has been in some measure the cause, that, of small neighbouring states, one has been eminent for valour, another for ingenuity; that one tribe has preserved a natural probity, and the next has been as much distinguished by art and dissimulation; especially since this has happened in cases where the nearness of the situation will not suffer us to impute so great variety to the difference of soil or climate. But though this principle seems to have a real foundation in nature, yet as it does not always operate with equal force, and as the evidence of it is often obscured by a mixture of other causes, we shall not much insist upon it,

but proceed to consider another of much higher efficacy to create and nourish affection, which is the force of habit and custom. Of all the various powers with which God has endued the different ranks of animals, there is none of more general use, nor more perfective of their natures, than that by which they acquire a facility of doing those actions which they are led to repeat often. It would be easy to show that the innumerable powers and instincts of the brutes themselves, which appear to be given them by the immediate impression of nature, are owing, in a great measure, to this fruitful cause. But, in mankind, it has much more evident and extensive effects. It influences the talents and characters of particular persons, and forms the different manners and genius of nations. By education and society, which are but different kinds of habit, and which (what-
ever

ever the great and the learned may think) constitute the only difference between themselves and the vulgar, men acquire new dispositions and principles, and become such different creatures as to be hardly capable of conversing or living together. The passions which affect large bodies of men, and preserve them united, are always founded on a similitude of circumstances and situation, which makes continually the same impressions on many different minds, and insensibly forces them to agree in one set of maxims and sentiments.

But, without appealing to those rare examples, which may be considered only as extraordinary efforts of discipline, the observation of common life is sufficient to explain how easily our affections are drawn to each other by the power of habit. Men are necessarily divided into an infinite

number of employments in order to supply the wants and conveniences of society. Those who are placed in the same situation, view the same side of objects in the same light; they experience the same sensations, combine the same ideas, receive the same notions, and often express them in a dialect peculiar to themselves. Agreeably to this, we perceive, in fact, that the several professions and orders of men have their respective views, pleasures, and passions, which qualify them to associate with each other, and almost entirely separate them from the rest of the world. This agreement of character renders their correspondence easy and pleasant, endears them to each other, by representing in the ideas and temper of their companions, the flattering resemblance of themselves; and is, perhaps, the most certain source of friendship. Now, there is no set of men

to

to whom this way of reasoning may be applied with greater force than to such as are united by the ties of blood. For who are less likely to differ in judgment and opinion, than they whose earliest thoughts and language are formed under one domestic discipline, who receive the same traditional form of knowledge from their common parents? If the resemblance of temper and inclination has any tendency to nourish affection, and certainly it has a very powerful one, none will more probably improve in love, than such as are drawn into that resemblance by the daily prevalence of custom and familiarity. Our manners necessarily derive a tincture from the characters that occur to us frequently and familiarly. There seems to be within us some secret principle of imitation, which leads us, without our observation or concurrence, to adopt the sentiments, dispositions,

sitions, and habits, observable in the persons whom we converse with. Even characters that have been formed in business and the world, that are guarded by dissimulation and interest, and confirmed by the prejudice of time against any innovation in their manners, have still been subject to some impressions of this nature. But how much more forcible and lasting must the impressions be that are made in the days of innocence and sincerity, before their young minds begin to be jealous of their sagacity, and while they are rendered easy to be pleased by their openness, their curiosity, and their love of amusement. In that innocent beginning of life, intimacies are more entirely formed; because the continual tendencies to affection are not opposed or weakened by ill intentions, by selfish views, or by that prudent suspicion which grows up with the knowledge
of

of the world. It is then, no doubt, that natural affection receives its chief improvement, and perhaps exerts itself with greater strength than at any other season. In the progress of education, they usually share together in the pleasures and liberty of youth, and their attachment every day becomes more habitual. And if afterwards they appear to be separated in the various roads of business, and pursuits of fortune; yet their interviews are usually frequent enough to keep alive an affection that has been so well established, and they return with a higher relish from the confused, indifferent mixture of the world, to the domestic fidelity and tenderness of their relations. But, great as the power of habit may seem, there is another by which they are held together, and which, to many, perhaps, will appear of much superior force—and that is interest. In the

ordinary train of things there cannot but happen incidents among those of the same family which call for their mutual assistance, and they are generally frequent enough to make them contract a habit of being useful to one another. From hence new obligations are continually arising, and fresh occasions of doing good, present themselves. It is easy to observe, but it is impossible to enumerate, the opportunities of kindness and gratitude which spring up perpetually amongst those who are descended from the same stock, who dwell under the same roof, and are engaged by education, opinion, habit, and duty, in an inviolable alliance. There is generally some important point which is regarded as the common interest of the family, and nothing is more natural than to favour those whose success is connected with their own. When they are separated
in

in the different tracks of life, they are seldom placed beyond the reach of being serviceable to each other ; nay are sometimes more enabled to be so by the difference of their employments : then every particular member of a family has always at hand a powerful support in the union and assistance of the whole : he feels his credit, his influence, and his talents, in a manner, multiplied, and becomes capable of attaining many ends which could never have been compassed by his own solitary endeavours. This unanimity is also the fairest recommendation to the world in general. Each member appears supported by the strength and interest of the rest, and it forms a general presumption in favour of their character, that they have shown themselves superior to the little vanities and competitions that are the common sources of discord : and we must add to the other motives

motives of interest, the firm and solid happiness that rises from the mere intercourse and enjoyment of this natural friendship, the pleasure of loving with that strong reliance and security of affection, very different from the superficial attachments that are formed and dissolved so easily in the commerce of the world. “Behold, how good and pleasant a thing it is, brethren, to dwell together in unity.” But, notwithstanding what has been observed is generally true, yet it cannot be denied that interest, at least what the world agrees to call so, does not, always act in support of natural affection. The same spirit of violence and injustice by which men break through their duty to God and the public, may sometimes prompt them to injure those who ought to be dearest to them. An excess of vanity, peevishness, or malevolence, may render any one as insup-

insupportable to his relations as to the rest of the world. Contentions in the division, or jealousies in the expectation of an inheritance, are sometimes unavoidable; and they may be aggravated by the suspicion of artifice, or the partialities of weak parents. But, in these cases, it is clearly the interest of all parties to confine the dissention to its proper subject, not to weaken the ties of nature for the sake of some precarious gain, but to disagree in such a manner as they ought to do who are born to be friends. It will be no loss, at such a time, to give up small advantages, and make large concessions to unreasonable and obstinate humours. There are too many, indeed, who chuse to decide their contests with their brethren in another way; who claim every thing, contest every thing, hear no excuses, make no allowances, and take care to let no pretence

tence of wrangling be lost. But these cannot be called gainers in any sense of the word. They cast away, at once, the hopes of mutual service, the treasure of friendship and affection which nature had provided for the comfort of their lives. They engage in contentions that will probably last long, because they are with those who are most nearly connected with them; that will probably be violent, because they are with those who are most able to hurt them; who know their imprudences and passions, who know the faults that escape the eye of the world. Inflamed with malice and rashness, they lay open the disgraces of their family; they make the things which good-nature and prudence would keep secret, the common subject of talk and ridicule; and they suffer, in consequence, the shame, the reflections, the losses which every one must

must suffer who gives up the decency of his character. Now, this behaviour is so destructive of happiness (and interest, as distinguished from happiness, signifies nothing that deserves our regard) that it must be no small accession of property which, to a prudent man, can appear an equivalent for so many mischiefs. But in this case, and in many others that arise in common life, men prejudice themselves that they may injure those they hate, and neglect their interest to indulge their resentment. Otherwise, in all contests in which men of integrity can be supposed capable of engaging, it is evidently their mutual advantage to decide them in such a manner as to leave the former ties of friendship, gratitude, and affection, subsisting in their full force. We can never guard our peace with too many securities against the accidents of life and the malice of the world.

Thus,

Thus, though the madness of passion may make men careless of their own and others good; though avarice, envy, and malice may violate whatever is dear and sacred, yet interest will generally be found to join in the support of natural affection.

Perhaps we may appear already to have employed too much time in explaining a subject so evident in itself, and so little liable to be contested; yet it can never be a work entirely useless to lay open the first sources of duty, and to keep them clear. There are many principles which are the less attended to, because it is taken for granted that they are settled and known: and we see that inattention may sometimes keep men ignorant of very obvious truths. Indeed we cannot, without the highest degree of it, suppress those evidences of natural affection which God has implanted in our constitutions. In what manner,
and

and under what limitations it is to be expressed, may appear a subject more worthy of our consideration. But that, too, may safely be trusted to the determination of an honest mind. Affection is naturally inventive, and will, of itself, discover more ways of conveying kindness and benefits than can easily be reduced to a certain rule. However, inclination alone is not sufficient to constitute duty; that can only arise from the force of reason, and the will of our Creator. What his will is in the present case, is revealed with equal clearness in his written word, and in the intimations given us by the nature of things. The first actions of human life that appear to be of any importance, are the domestic services that pass between relations. Here the notions of right and wrong are formed, the first essays of behaviour are made, and the exercise of duty is for several years confined

confined to the nearest objects of it. It is probable that during this period the only actions and objects in which they feel themselves concerned, may appear to them almost the only things in nature of real importance; but time and experience open their prospect, and enlarge their sphere of action. When they take their part in the business of the world, they enter into new employments and interests, and find themselves obliged to act in many different relations. Now these relations, though perfectly consistent in themselves, are yet liable to be limited and restrained by each other; and he is the best man who fulfils them all with the greatest exactness.

To discern impartially, and to perform sincerely, what is required of us, in these different capacities, is a task which claims and deserves our best attention. Thus, to instance in the subject we are treating of,
much

much prudence and goodness of heart is necessary to preserve, at all times, a due regard to the original ties of nature, amidst the distractions of business and the changes of fortune. Instances of misbehaviour, in this respect, are but too common. Some are blamed for entirely deserting those who are related to them, in pursuit of more profitable attachments. By acquiring the means of serving their brethren, they lose the inclination. Many reap no other fruit from the prosperity of their relations but scorn and neglect; who think themselves too nearly allied to such as put the world in mind of the condition they lately shared with them. Such too, in some dispositions, is the power of envy, that they look with uneasiness on the rising talents of those who are most closely connected with them, and cannot help repining at the successes by which they

hoped themselves to be made considerable : and where an equality of circumstances is preserved, yet their natural union is frequently too much weakened by little jealousies and competitions, by disputes on trifles, and the want of mutual indulgence. Now there is nothing in all this to destroy the arguments that have been used in favour of our earliest obligation. All we can infer from such instances is, that man is a changeable creature ; that virtue and piety do not depend on the temper alone, but must be supported by rational principles and a consistent conduct. For, without a due attention to this, it may be possible to offend against duty as much by serving relations improperly, as by entirely neglecting them. An excessive attachment to family interests becomes at length unjust and odious, and degenerates into a kind of selfishness, which is the source of
great

great iniquity. It may interfere with most important obligations ; it may obstruct the exercise of charity and benevolence ; it corrupts our natural candour and equity, and forms, by degrees, that mean, contracted turn of thought which destroys all usefulness and dignity of character. Indeed, in these cases, the generality will always act as they are led by example and opinion, and the ideas of advantage that are present to their minds : and it is as true, that the effects of their conduct upon the world and themselves will be answerable to the causes of it. But those who seek to know and obey the pure and perfect will of God, will easily see that one obligation is not to be fulfilled at the expence of another. Our duty consists in acting suitably to all the relations which arise from our circumstances and condition, in promoting that part of the general

happinefs which Providence has committed to our care. Here there is little room for choice and inclination. What our behaviour ought to be is fixed and determined by the nature of things. When men are led by fancy, humour, or importunity, to facrifice real duties to favourite attachments, they destroy the bands of their conduct, which immediately becomes uncertain and precarious; and they lose the rational, manly enjoyment of life, which they only who have experienced know how to value. And this unsteadiness of character renders them always liable to the breach of every obligation, and tends to confirm the truth of that alarming assertion in St. James, “that
“whofoever shall keep the whole law, and
“yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”

Let us, then, exercise with steadiness this sacred authority over our weakneffes and

our

our slavish desires—it is the noblest prerogative that God has given us. By thus constantly employing our passions in the service of our duty, we shall seize all the occasions of doing good as they arise; we shall serve not only our families and our friends, but our neighbours, our countrymen, and all of mankind that come within the reach of our benevolence, for they also are our brethren.

THE HISTORY OF THE

OWNERSHIP OF THE
TERRITORY OF THE
UNITED STATES
FROM 1763 TO 1898
BY
JOHN R. HARRIS
OF THE
BUREAU OF LAND COMMISSIONERS
WASHINGTON, D. C.
1898

THE HISTORY OF THE
TERRITORY OF THE
UNITED STATES
FROM 1763 TO 1898
BY
JOHN R. HARRIS
OF THE
BUREAU OF LAND COMMISSIONERS
WASHINGTON, D. C.
1898

S E R M O N . V.

LUKE, xvi. 8.

The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

THIS is a reflection made by our Saviour upon the conduct of the unjust steward, who being detected in a long course of fraud, and having quite lost all credit with his lord, endeavoured to secure an interest with his tenants, by directing them to bring in unfair accounts. One of only a moderate talent for knavery would have been filled with fears and scruples in such a situation. He would have been cautious of repeating his dishonest practices at the

very instant when they were detected; and for some space of time would wish, and pretend, and perhaps endeavour to be honest. But the steward in the parable was a master in his art; he adheres to his principles, and takes refuge in the very knavery to which he owed his disgrace. It is this consistency of character, this superiority in wickedness, that gave occasion to our Saviour to make the observation contained in the words of the text, “ that
“ the children of this world are in their
“ generation wiser than the children of
“ light.” The comparison lies between worldly men, who pursue honour, wealth, or power, as their chief end, with a consistent conduct and a prudent choice of means, and those who apply their endeavours with care and sincerity to the better works of righteousness. The former are said to be wiser in their generation, to proceed with greater skill

skill and industry in the attainment of what they seek. In what sense and to what degree they may be said to do so, we shall enquire. By wisdom, whether we mean the wisdom of the children of this world, or that which is from above, is to be understood not mere knowledge only, but knowledge reduced to practice; that knowledge which forms our habits, and governs our lives and manners. But as knowledge is always an essential part of wisdom, nay, the very principle and foundation of it; it is to be considered in the first place, whether good men are as well acquainted with their duty, as the selfish men they are compared with are with the maxims of worldly prudence. Perhaps there is no part of knowledge that lies so open and obvious to the minds of men, or is so continually forced upon their observation by the circumstances that surround

round them, as the knowledge of their duty. That we ought to reverence and adore the Supreme Author of our being, is the evident and immediate consequence of his existence: which is proved to our understanding, and almost to our senses, by the goodness and wisdom which, wherever we turn ourselves, we see displayed in the works of his hands. How we ought to live in that society of our fellow-creatures where God has placed us; the necessity of observing the laws of justice; the exquisite pleasure and endless advantages of mutual good-will; the reasons why sobriety and industry are preferable to idleness and intemperance, are truths of that easy and simple kind which the mind perceives at once, without any effort; what the meanest are not ignorant of, what children discover of themselves. And yet he who knows these, knows all
the

the most essential part of our obligations which the will of our Heavenly Father has subjected us to. Indeed there may sometimes be room for thought and skill in the application of these principles to the various circumstances of action. Thus in our endeavours to exert that good-will, whose part it is to consult the interests, and promote the happiness of our neighbour, there is often room for choice and deliberation about the means to be employed. Good offices will be of greater service, and be better received, if done at a seasonable time, or in a well-judged manner. Some happy persons there are, and they have fallen more or less within the observation of us all, who are blest with a dexterity of doing good, have the art of seasoning their obligations, and can win affection the shortest way; while others, who mean, perhaps, as well, by
choosing

choosing wrong objects, or improper methods, often waste their goodness in endeavours of little service, and hardly gain esteem. But now if we turn to the other part of our subject, it appears immediately, that the knowledge, talents, and habits necessary to rise in the world, admit of an almost infinite extent and variety, not to be perfectly comprehended by the largest and most laborious understanding. Business is in its nature divided into many important heads, each of which branches out into several inferior divisions, which end in a detail of numberless minute particulars, that can hardly be brought within the compass of one man's memory or experience. The knowledge of mankind, of their dispositions and characters, which is more or less necessary in all kinds of business—what a vast field does it open to us! how full of thought and observation!

tion ! What art, what attention, is requisite to gain, to lead, to govern the inclinations of men, and direct them to the advancement of our own design ! and, after the most prudent choice and dextrous employment of means, how very precarious is the event ! how liable to be altered by chance ; by the cunning of rivals, or the folly of friends !

Every one is not endowed with those various talents and that ductile temper which is fitted for insinuation and intrigue. The steadiness and application which are necessary in the conduct of business, are often found inconsistent with that penetration and vivacity of thought, which are of the utmost service to it whenever they happen to unite. It may be said, indeed, that men who seek after wealth and power, employ their desires in the pursuit of what is most agreeable to them ; and follow

low the natural stream of their passions; and, by consequence, it is no wonder if they proceed with greater ease and success than those who are continually forced to oppose nature and inclination in the service of virtue. But this argument, perhaps, has not so much force in it as at first may appear. God has not dealt so hardly with good men, as to put them alone under a necessity of never doing what they please. Ambition and avarice have sacrifices to make, and passions to be restrained; and often put their votaries to severer proofs of self-denial, than any that are exacted by religion, in the common course of things. Besides, in prudential matters, it is the part of wisdom to be guided by appearances and probabilities, which are fallacious in their nature, and admit of no higher assurance than is to be gathered from guess and conjecture. But
in

in the performance of our duty, when we have done honestly and sincerely what appears to be right, the proposed end is obtained : for the greatest pitch of goodness which man can aim at, must still be such as is consistent with human error and weakness. But the success of the worldly man, supposing his endeavours to be equal, must, in its own nature, be far more uncertain and precarious. His designs may have been formed with judgment, and executed with diligence and constancy. He may have provided against all difficulties that could be foreseen, and mastered all that lay in his way ; and yet, the superior advantages, or better fortune of a rival, may destroy the whole scheme : the unskilful officiousness of his friends may ruin it ; the secret arts of those who envy him may undermine it ; — even chance itself may defeat, in an instant, the contrivances

contrivances that prudence has been labouring whole years to mature. There is something hard and inflexible in the course of human affairs, that will not give way to the advice or endeavours of the wisest. Great talents may waste themselves in useless efforts, unless they happen to be favoured by the times, and meet with characters and circumstances fit to work upon. One would think that this darkness and uncertainty, which accompanies all the interested and worldly views of men, was designed on purpose by Providence, to make them endeavour after that in which they are always certain of succeeding—the advantages of piety, and the rewards of a good life. But we are fond to acknowledge that this gracious purpose of our Maker does not usually meet with that concurrence in mankind, which duty, and reason, and interest require

quire of them. Though the law we are under is most evidently reasonable and useful; though the practice of it has no difficulty in it, but what arises from the unwillingness and corruption of men; and though it is no less calculated by its mild and benevolent dictates to please the heart, than to convince the understanding; yet few are found who can be said sufficiently to understand, or love, or practise it. But we must search for the causes of this unhappy negligence, not in the divine law itself, which is pure and faultless, but in the corrupt affections and depravity of the human heart. It is too obvious to need a proof, that the thoughts and inclinations of men in general never dwell long upon religion, and are very seldom turned towards it. It is neither the fashion of the idle, nor the employment of the busy part of the world: even those who follow vir-

tue, follow it not with that zeal and spirit with which men pursue the callings by which they hope to grow rich and eminent. There is a laziness, a faintness, something that borders upon indifferency, in all endeavours where no interest but that of piety is in view. It is submitted to as a burthen, or obeyed as a law; or performed, like an unpleasant task, with carelessness and haste. It is no wonder, therefore, if such a service is destitute of all that vigour and perfection which appear in the works of inclination and desire. There, the employments which men are satisfied with, and fond of, are carried on in a very different manner: even the disappointments and obstacles, which discourage the irresolute, become strong incitements to a willing mind; which call forth its warmest endeavours, and sometimes make it attain to a degree of excellency
that

that seemed beyond the reach of its abilities. They, too, who are employed in matters fuitable to their inclination, contract a steadiness and constancy of action, which is always proceeding towards its end; and are not diverted from their way by the temptations, which others who have no relish for their business easily give into. Now, considering the real nature of things, it is not at all surprising that the attention of the generality should be more strongly turned towards their present worldly interests, than towards the distant rewards which are offered by religion. They receive their earliest and liveliest impressions of pleasure from sensible objects, and from thence they form their first confused notions of happiness. Some enjoyments they are led to by nature and necessity; and they perceive that, to a certain degree, the acquisition or preservation of

temporal good things is an indispenfible part of every man's bufinefs. They learn to place fome value upon riches, not only by the fordid example of the covetous, but by the œconomy of the reasonable and prudent. They are neceffarily taught by the practice of the world, and by their own fenfe of things, to look upon credit, intereft, and honours, as real advantages, and proper objects of their purfuit.

Now inclinations of this kind, if confidered in themfelves, are right and ufeful; fitted to carry on the bufinefs of fociety, and to make our tempers and characters fuch as Providence designed them to be: and to them in effect are owing the principal conveniences and ornaments that belong to human life. Yet it is very evident that there are limits beyond which they ought not to be indulged; and that there are objects to which they ought not

to

to be directed ; and it is extremely difficult for men to moderate the pursuit of those things they are fondest of, and to which their interest, as well as pleasure, is generally understood to lead them. Now when the passions, the prudence, the industry and emulation of mankind, are all unanimously pointed the same way, there is nothing wonderful if their success and attainments should be proportionable to their endeavours, and that they should grow extremely skilful in the gratification of their common desires. But what proficiency may we reasonably expect these same men should make in a study of a different kind, which pretends to restrain and regulate, nay sometimes to contradict and subdue the very desires and appetites which are the strongest springs of action ? Yet, this is what the religion of the gospel, and those who preach it, under-

take to perform ; and, it must be owned, they succeed accordingly. The principles they build upon may be self-evident, the consequences they draw may be clear and just, and the conclusions they form may be as undeniable as they are important; and yet what impression can they be supposed to make upon such as neither love nor listen to them? It is very possible to remain ignorant, through negligence, of the plainest things ; or, through slothfulness, to grow incapable of performing the easiest. Even those who have shewn themselves qualified for the greatest employments have often found themselves at a loss in matters of much less difficulty and consequence, when they have been put out of their way, and called upon to reason on subjects they were strangers to. And thus, our religious duties, the knowledge of which is simple and obvious beyond any other,

adapted

adapted to all ranks, and ages, and capacities, agreeable to the clearest reason of our mind, and the natural sentiments of our heart; these duties, I say, may appear abstruse and almost incomprehensible to such as have spent their whole lives in transgressing them. One might be apt to imagine from this view of things, that the practice of virtue and religion must continually become fainter and weaker, and, by degrees, the very knowledge and remembrance of them be worn away: and it is natural to enquire, if the cause of righteousness is entirely deserted by Heaven, and left without a witness in our hearts. But our own hearts will answer us, that, in the first place, we have a sense of right and wrong within us, which, in the common duties of life, is a plain and faithful instructor: and though it may sometimes not be heard, or perhaps be silent in the

noise of passion, or in the slumber of carelessness and inattention, yet when we observe what passes without us in the world, it always honestly distinguishes the true worth of actions and characters. Nobody is at a loss to point out the steps by which the wretches he sees are led to ruin and poverty: and the generous benefactor, whose goodness charms and melts the hearts of men, has no kind of mystery in his trade; his actions and motives are clear and open, every one knows from whence they come, and whither they tend, and knows himself able, if he pleases, to imitate them. All men have in them the same principles of life and reason, the same passions and faculties, which they may mould and temper as they think fit, and form themselves into vessels for honour or dishonour. We may add farther, that besides the light of reason, by which we distinguish

distinguish the difference of good and evil in our actions, there is the voice of conscience within us, by which we are convinced, that in neglecting these distinctions, we violate the law of our nature, and having thus incurred guilt, have thereby made ourselves liable to punishment. And we cannot believe that the Almighty Governor of the world, whose works are the perfection of order, wisdom, and benevolence, will patiently see his laws neglected by the creatures whom he formed on purpose to obey them. But if, at any time, difficulties might arise concerning the nature of duty, or the will and authority of their eternal Judge, in the minds of men, who follow only the glimmerings of reason, or the false lustre of superstition; yet no such doubts can ever affect our minds, who know what is the pure and perfect will of God, and have the treasures of
divine

divine wisdom and love revealed to us in the holy Scriptures.

Now it is evident that these religious considerations, as long as they can be kept present to the mind, are well able to oppose the vanities of fashion, to quench the allurements of sense, and to subdue the pride of life; but when they are not present to the mind, they can have no more effect upon it than things entirely forgotten, or never known. Here it is that men are indispensibly obliged to exercise that power over their faculties, which is one of the most valuable talents that Heaven has trusted to their care. Notwithstanding the obstinacy of habit, and the importunity of passion, they may turn their attention, if they please, to the works and the rewards of piety. And the oftener those excellent subjects are thought of, the more important will they appear, and the
more

more easily be thought of again. Nay, it is possible for them, by persevering in these pious exercises, to grow as sincerely fond of virtue as the vain and worldly are of their wealth and honours. We sometimes see men, who have been long addicted to speculation, pursuing their enquiries with a fondness of attention that can hardly be diverted by the action of sense, or the calls of nature. But goodness and piety are not employed in these abstruse matters; they rise from the natural sentiments of our hearts, and are exercised in the common business of life. Yet our improvement in them must depend, like all other improvement, upon habit and application. By perseverance in these, it is possible in time to find that true delight in the exercise of devotion, which the idle and luxurious seek for in vain in their favourite amusements. A disinterested act
of

of justice, a charitable deed that makes the heart of the afflicted overflow with comfort and gratitude, may bring as much pleasure, and profit too, to a mind duly prepared to receive them, as the worldly man can find from the discovery of some shorter method of encreasing his wealth. Indeed, if men were capable of tasting this superiority of enjoyment in all instances, there would have been no room for that observation of our Saviour's, "that
" the children of this world are in their
" generation wiser than the children of
" light." But so near an approach to perfection is not to be hoped for from the generality even of sincere Christians. That perhaps is only the privilege of saints and angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect. Men will still, no doubt, continue, as in all former ages, to join too great an attachment to the things of this life with
their

their endeavours after a better. They will be too apt to accommodate religion to the fashion of the age, the tempers of the great, and the received conditions of preferment. They will praise humanity and benevolence, but yet find a satisfactory reason for being, on some occasions, injurious and oppressive to their inferiors. They will condemn the corruptions of the age, and lament the growth of vice and immorality; but will join at the same time in the idleness, the dissipation, and the pleasures which are the natural causes of it. Now this insincere obedience is evidently owing to an opinion lurking at the bottom of their hearts, that religion is a wearisome task, of which every prudent man would decline as much as he could, imposed by a severe Lord, who does not chuse to let his creatures please themselves. It is impossible they should pay so little attention to their duty,
if

if they considered it as the commands of their all-wise and all-merciful Father, given them purely for their own advantage, to prevent their injuring themselves by the abuse of their reason and liberty, and to guide them in the attainment of their true and natural happiness. And yet that this is really the case, every one who compares the divine law with his own nature, and the real state of the world, can hardly avoid perceiving. The Psalmist evidently speaks from experience, when he assures us, that “the law of the Lord is an unfail-
“ filed law, converting the soul; that the
“ statutes of the Lord are right, and rejoice
“ the heart. More to be desired are they
“ than gold, yea, than much fine gold;
“ sweeter also than honey and the honey-
“ comb. Moreover by them is thy servant
“ taught, and in keeping of them there is
“ great reward.”

S E R-

S E R M O N VI.

PSALM cvii. 43.

*Whofo is wife, and will confider thefe things,
even they fhall underftand the loving kind-
nefs of the Lord.*

THIS pfalm appears, from feveral paffages in it, to have been compofed in memory of the return from captivity. The primary design is to celebrate the mercies of Providence in the reftoration of the Jewish people; but having mentioned the loving kindnefs of the Lord, the religious mind of the Author is ftruck with the many obvious marks of it in the conftitution of nature, and takes notice of its appearances
in

in several instances. He observes that wickedness is usually followed by punishment. “ Fools, because of their transgressions, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted ;” and though their case seems to be the least of all entitled to compassion, yet, even these, “ when they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, he saveth them out of their distress.” He then observes the peculiar care of Providence attending on those “ who go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters ;” alluding probably to a successful voyage performed about that time by some of his own nation, and which might appear the more extraordinary to the inhabitants of an inland country. He next observes the conduct of Providence in the irregular changes of the seasons : “ He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and water-springs into a dry ground. A
“ fruitful

“ fruitful land maketh he barren, for the
 “ wickedness of them that dwell therein.”

The inference drawn by him from all these observations, is full of wisdom and piety. “ Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord.”

The daily observation of what happens in the course of nature, and in the life of man, is fully sufficient to manifest to a considerate mind the infinite goodness of our heavenly Father. In order to pursue the same kind of meditation into which the pious Psalmist has led us, I shall first mention some of the proofs of divine goodness that are visible in the works of nature, and in the condition of mankind; and, secondly, point out the moral and religious uses of the doctrine itself.

Though the goodness of God is acknowledged, in general terms, by all who pro-

fess themselves his worshippers, yet the proofs of it are little attended to, and the use and importance of it with regard to religion are seldom duly considered. Great ignorance and obscurity must necessarily accompany the notions we form of God. He is known to us only by his works; and when we endeavour to frame in our minds an image of his character, we only consider, by an imperfect kind of analogy, what human qualities would be the cause of such events in a Being capable of producing them. What we attribute to the Divine Power, or Wisdom, or Goodness, may possibly be only different exertions of the same principle; and that, perhaps, some principle of which we have no more conception than reptiles have of human reason and philosophy. And perhaps there may be no ground in the Divine Nature for that distinction of moral and natural qualities

lities which takes place so evidently in mankind. These things are mentioned by way of caution, and to show that, in order to think soberly of the hidden things that belong to God, we ought, almost at every step, to be put in mind of our own ignorance.

Leaving, therefore, the Divine Nature in that awful obscurity in which it must probably ever remain to all-created beings, it is our business to study the visible effects and manifestations of it. And we need not look far to see that “ the earth is full
“ of the goodness of the Lord ; the earth,
“ O Lord, is full of thy mercy.” Time would fail us, if we were to attempt to describe the various ranks and natures of the creatures who are our fellow inhabitants on this globe. The soil, the climate, the element they dwell in, are always most accurately suited to their natures : an ample provision is made of the food that is

proper for them; and they are furnished with the strength and the activity, and even with the weapons and the sagacity that is necessary to procure it. They all pursue the dictates of nature, and during their appointed term, enjoy the gratifications of life. They feel no disquiet or uneasiness, but what arises from the actual sense of pain, of which they suffer no more than what immediately affects them, without apprehension or regret; and even that is intended for the preservation of their nature, by guarding against what is destructive of it. Their powers are limited, and their actions uniform; but their condition is complete in its kind. Their pleasures are simple and natural, far superior, upon the whole, to their sufferings; so that we must acknowledge them to be placed in a state of happiness: and indeed their voices and gestures are generally expressive of inward satisfaction, and attest the
goodness

goodness of their Maker. But the race of man has a clear and visible pre-eminence over the rest. He has powers and faculties allotted to him, which fit him for better enjoyments, and a superior kind of life. And, besides this, God has given him “dominion over the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air.” By labour, and art, and experience, he is enabled to subdue their force, and baffle their cunning. Nay, such is his superiority, that he can apply their strength, their swiftness, their sagacity, to serve his various purposes, and use them as mere instruments in the advancement of his own designs.

Man, therefore, of all the beings we are acquainted with, undoubtedly possesses the largest portion of the divine favour. He partakes, in common with other animals, of the gratifications of sense,

and even those are imparted to him with more variety, and in greater excellence. Besides this, he has the faculty of reason, which enables him to observe the consequences of things, to make trial of what is best, and to grow wise by experience. He is also enabled to profit by the discoveries of other men, and the lights of former ages. The inferior animals very soon reach the height of that improvement their nature is susceptible of, and there remain at a stand; but the mind of man is in a progressive state, always acquiring fresh information, collecting experience, improving the arts of life, increasing the general stock of knowledge, and facilitating the means of conveying it. And being thus qualified to delight in the discovery and contemplation of truth: he is, by degrees, enabled to raise his thoughts above the transient state of the present life, and,
by

by observing the wisdom manifested in the frame of the world, to collect, at least an imperfect knowledge of the great Creator. And lest our reasoning, through inattention or sensuality, or the cares of the world, should be defective or erroneous, our heavenly Father has himself revealed to us all that it is our duty to do, and given that knowledge and that grace which is sufficient for us: in particular, he has confirmed and enlarged the hopes of that immortality which nature longed after, but not without secret doubts and misgivings.

It is too hard a task, in the narrow compass we have assigned to ourselves, to reckon up the advantages that are peculiar to mankind: let it suffice, that in whatever instance reason is preferable to sense, and art and experience to instinct; in whatever respect the wisdom and strength

of numbers united in society, are superior to solitary brutal force and ignorance ; all this is to be numbered among the privileges of mankind. And it adds much to the dignity of their character, that God has made them capable, as it were, of an intercourse with himself by devotion and prayer ; that he considers them as creatures fit to be trusted with their own conduct, and governs them not by necessary impulses, but by the freedom of reason and law. And even the government we are required to submit ourselves to, perhaps is the greatest proof of the divine goodness we have received. The obedience which God has exacted from us as the rule of behaviour in our commerce with the world is, “ to do unto other men as we would they should do unto us.” As if the endless display of his bounty in the universe had been insufficient to answer all the good

good purposes of his benevolence, he exhorts and commands his creatures to unite in procuring their own happiness, to join their endeavours in carrying on the public good. Now, the very exercise of this duty is not only productive of the good effects which it aims at, but is in itself a pleasure of the most exalted kind. Unhappy is that mind which knows not the delight that is felt in doing good, and the love and gratitude that ought to attend the receiving of it. Could we suppose the same benefits to be the produce of chance, or the gifts of fortune, or even the rewards of industry; yet, without the intercourse of mutual obligation, the most exquisite part of the enjoyment would be lost. So great has appeared the attention of Providence, not only to our happiness itself, but even in the manner and circumstances that may recommend and endear it to us.

This

This is no where more clearly manifest than in the ties of natural relation by which men are linked together by the communication of benefits which are made necessary by their situation. The existence, the nourishment and protection of the whole species, in their early years, are owing entirely to that strong, and, in some sense, involuntary love and tenderness, which is implanted, for the wisest ends, in the bosom of their parents. And even in the common intercourse of life between persons who are no wise related, there arise continually such calls for relief and assistance, such demands for aid and advice in all business of consequence, that it seems to have been the study of nature to unite and endear men to each other, by rendering their mutual services so necessary. Nor is it an argument to the contrary, that men are capable of malice and enmity, and can

occa-

occasionally take pleasure in the mischief and injuries they bring upon their neighbours ; for this is evidently owing not to the due exercise, but to the corruption, of reason and temper. The intention of nature is clear and evident, and whosoever thwarts it will have much to suffer and much to answer for.

Having, therefore, all the marks of the divine goodness we have mentioned, and numberless others continually impressed upon our minds, let us, in the next place, consider the moral and religious uses to which these observations may be applied.

In the first place, the least and lowest return we can make for all the blessings conferred upon us is to be contented and pleased with them. It would be unpardonable ingratitude to repine and murmur at our situation, when it appears to have been the intention of Nature and Providence

dence to make us happy. Mankind, indeed, are not exempt from sufferings, which proceed in many instances from the natural causes which are necessary to their preservation and welfare. But if we take away those evils which are of our own making, the pangs of envy and discontent, of malice and resentment, the pains with which nature is loaded by luxury and intemperance, human life, in its pure natural state, will appear to abound in comforts and enjoyments; and its sufferings will be reduced to a few natural evils which seldom occur, and are very supportable in themselves. On the contrary, the sources of our happiness are always open; pleasures are distributed to us with a liberal hand, and there are few but have suffered more from the excess than from the want of them. The meanest condition of life is not without enjoyments that are sometimes

times the envy of their betters. So great is the profusion of benefits that is showered upon us by the divine beneficence, that many of them escape our notice, not because they are inconsiderable, but because they are common and general; whereas the sufferings men feel are always observed and remembered, and are commonly very needlessly increased by apprehension and impatience. Mankind, if they please, may abuse the favour of Heaven, converting the innocence of natural pleasure into criminal excesses, employing their reason and other faculties to make themselves and their fellow-creatures miserable; but let them not impute to Providence the evils they bring upon themselves. Nothing is plainer from the whole constitution of nature, than that God has shown more kindness to mankind than they bear to one another; and that, however they may
abuse

abuse the liberty he has given them, his gracious intention is, that, practising the works of righteousness, they should spend their days in happiness and love. For, indeed, if human felicity may in any case be considered as an object worthy the attention of our heavenly Father, it is in the performance of that obedience, and of those services, which are declared to be due to him by reason and nature. If, therefore, good men feel, at any time, uneasiness and terror in the exercise of their religious duties, let them be assured that it must be owing to some unjust opinion which they have conceived of the divine nature. Virtue and innocence can have nothing to fear from him who is the protector of innocence, and the rewarder of virtue.

If we consider fairly the nature of our situation, so well suited to our faculties
and

and our wants ; the advantages we enjoy beyond other animals, and those which many of us enjoy beyond other men ; that in the immense variety of the creation there is hardly an object from whence we do not evidently derive some good, convenience, or satisfaction, which does not some way tend to the increase of knowledge, or the improvement of life ; that these blessings are continually improving upon us ; that we possess many useful discoveries, many valuable conveniences, that were unknown to our forefathers ; and that posterity will doubtless have the same kind of advantage over ourselves : putting all these things together, and feeling the endless obligations we are under to the great Giver of all this good, surely it must appear to every rational mind that the most just, most suitable, most honourable employment of our lives, must consist in showing,

ing, by all the methods in our power, our gratitude, and a constant wakeful sense of his goodness. His mercies are continually passing over our heads, too numerous to be distinctly perceived, and full of deeper wisdom and utility than our comprehensions can reach. But let not the greatest of them pass by unnoticed; let us observe, remember, and acknowledge them to the utmost of our power. Let us single out the more illustrious manifestations of his goodness, and render them familiar to our minds; and where can we find more eminent instances of it than in the revelation of the gospel, which, indeed, is nothing more than the continuance and perfection of that goodness which has been displayed from all eternity in his works. It was perfectly agreeable to that divine love and goodness we have endeavoured to describe, to place our first parents in
Paradise

Paradise, amidst all the means of happiness, and with the powers of body and mind which are fitted to the enjoyment of it. It was yet a greater instance of his fatherly goodness, after these privileges were forfeited by the transgression of his commands, to receive them and their posterity into favour, and to give them a capacity of attaining a state of more perfect felicity than what they had lost. That this great work was conducted by the intervention of a divine person, the only Son of God, is a mysterious depth of mercy and wisdom, which our hearts must adore and reverence, but which our minds can never comprehend, since the angels in vain endeavour to look into it. All the knowledge of this high transaction that is necessary for us, is contained in the most authentic of all histories, the Holy Scriptures. Great blessings and privileges,

VOL. I.

L

which

which call for our utmost praise and gratitude, we there find are conferred upon us by means far surpassing our narrow understandings. That part which lies most level to our capacities, and may therefore most usefully be considered by us, is, that this Divine Person appeared amongst us in the form of a man, attesting his divinity by signs and miracles, and teaching the world a holy law, containing the pure and perfect will of God. Perhaps it would be natural to expect that a law delivered by such a person, and with this divine solemnity, should contain something new, and till then unknown to the world. But this law, as it is recorded in the gospel, is exactly the same, as far as we are able to compare them, with those rules of life, which nature and reason would dictate to such creatures as men in such a situation as theirs. In this part there is nothing difficult

difficult to be understood, no strange observances, no mysterious ceremonies. The sum and substance of our duty is plain truth and justice, the equitable consideration of our neighbour's case and our own; that peaceable temper which every body esteems and wishes to live with; that humanity which is the growth of our own hearts; that compassion and indulgence of which the guilty and unfortunate stand so much in need, and which are so amiable and endearing in the sight of God and man. And we need no other instructor in our duty to God than the remembrance of his loving kindneses, and the natural impression they ought to make upon a grateful heart. Be not surpris'd that it should be thought an employment worthy of the Son of God to teach such plain useful truths as these. In the observation of these truths consists all that is great, and excel-

lent, and divine in man. Notwithstanding that they are plain and simple, that it was the business of every man to learn them, that many who were wise in their own conceit affected to make it their study to teach them; yet, before the days of our Saviour, they were generally neglected or misunderstood, or at best imperfectly known. It is by obedience to this simple law that we can alone secure to ourselves the glorious inheritance purchased for us by the life and death of our blessed Saviour, and the mysterious redemption of man. It is only by obedience to this law that we can hope to steer through the shifting scenes of this world, the returns of success and disappointment, the mingled intercourse of friends and enemies, the imperfect enjoyments which we greedily seek after, but seldom meet with, and the uncertain consequences that attend upon
all

all that we do ; and it is on this alone that we must ground our hopes and expectations of the rewards allotted to the just in a future state, when the goodness of God shall be made manifest by completing the happiness of his creatures.

S E R M O N VII.

GAL. V. 13.

*Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty,
only use not liberty for an occasion to the
flesh, but by love serve one another.*

MOST of those who, in our own days, have declared against Christianity, have been offended with the strictness and severity of its precepts. On the contrary, the Apostle St. Paul, who certainly knew the nature of the doctrine he taught, represents it in the text, and many other passages, as the law of liberty.

That we may comprehend the full extent of his meaning, we shall endeavour,

in the first place, to explain what state of liberty it is into which we are admitted by the gospel. We shall, secondly, consider the abuses of that liberty, implied in those words, “only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh.” And, thirdly, we shall show how those abuses are rectified or prevented, if “by love we serve one another.”

There is a great analogy between religious and civil liberty. Civil liberty does not imply a freedom from all restraint; for that is the very state of licentiousness, to remove the inconveniences of which civil government was first erected. For every man to do what is right in his own eyes, is to expose every man to suffer by the malice and caprice of his neighbours: so that they who propose to live at peace and quiet, and even with freedom, will find it necessary for them to give up some
part

part of their liberty, in order to preserve the rest. And, such an establishment being the result of choice and deliberation, the choice of men carefully consulting their own interest, is reasonably considered as a state of freedom; for it is the freest condition in which men can live in security. Now, religion being a species of government, the government not of our external behaviour, but of our hearts and minds, by the laws and influence of our heavenly Father; the freedom we are to seek for here is something of the same kind with that civil liberty we have endeavoured to describe; not a freedom from all check and restraints, but from such only as are not imposed on us by the divine law, which, as it flows either from revelation, or arises immediately from the constitution of nature, to submit to it is to obey our own reason, and what ought
to

to be our choice. For, indeed, the precepts of religion are as necessary to preserve the innocence and procure the perfection of our natures, as the civil laws are to secure our lives and properties. The former, in reality, as much concern our interest and happiness, and, consequently, ought to be submitted to as freely as the latter. As for those actions which are held indifferent, and which, nevertheless, employ the chief part of the time even of the wisest and the busiest men, it is an undoubted right of our Christian liberty to manage them according to our own discretion. Yet, even if any of these actions should happen to become of importance to our neighbour's happiness, or our own, they immediately change their nature, and are to be regulated by the general principles of our duty. But to do this, in all instances, requires more discernment and
more

more attention than the generality of men are always masters of. However, in this consists a great and eminent part of our Christian liberty: for we are not tied down to the punctual observance of times and ceremonies. Nothing useleſs or trivial is enjoined in the goſpel. Even the inferior branches of moral duty are not very diſtinctly enumerated and deſcribed; but the great outlines of duty, the principles from whence an honeſt and conſiderate mind may collect how we ought to act in particular caſes, theſe are laid down, and inculcated with the greateſt force and evidence. That we ſhould render to all their dues; “ fear to whom fear; honour to “ whom honour is due.” That we ſhould “ love our neighbours as ourſelves;” that “ whatſoever we would that men ſhould “ do unto us, even ſo we ſhould do unto “ them;” that we ſhould “ follow that “ which

“ which is good to all men ;” that we should “ live soberly, righteously, and “ godlily, in this present world.” These and such like general descriptions are given, that we may attend to the true foundations of our duty ; that we may enlarge our minds by accustoming them to the contemplation of what is good upon the whole, and be under a necessity of exercising our reason, and applying it to particular cases as they arise. Had there only been given to us a vast number of unconnected precepts, the burthen upon the memory would have been insupportable ; the meaning of many expressions, from the nature of words and things, would necessarily have been obscure, and not understanding the general design of the whole, we should have been liable to imposition, from the cunning of those who lie in wait to deceive. But God has not dealt so with

us,

us. He has made us judges not only of our own conduct, but of the rule we are to follow. He has not prescribed to us, in every instance, the most minute directions to regulate our behaviour; but he has opened and laid before us the great fountains from whence they flow. "The commandments of the Lord are pure, enlightening the eyes." This is the surest method of working upon rational and liberal minds; this secures us most effectually from the impositions of deceivers, and from the weakness and dishonesty of our own hearts; this ought to open all the sources in our nature of duty and gratitude towards him who has taught and enabled us to perform that rational service which alone can be acceptable to the Father of Spirits. Having thus endeavoured to explain the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, we shall next consider
the

the abuses of that liberty, referred to in the text : “ Use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh.”

At the time when our Apostle wrote, the most flagrant abuse of this liberty was to plead an exemption from some parts of the moral law, on a pretence that it was abolished, together with the ceremonial law. Christ himself, from the beginning, was aware of this perverseness in some of his followers, and one would suppose had taken the most effectual means to prevent it. “ Think not,” says he (in his first public discourse to the Jews), “ that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets ; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.” Notwithstanding so great an authority, this absurd and weak spirit of interpretation appears, from some passages in scripture, to have prevailed in the Apostles’ time ; and, soon after, ecclesiastical

cal history is full of it. The doctrine of absolute unconditional election and reprobation, which makes the salvation of men depend on something entirely foreign to their own behaviour; the indefectibility of the divine grace, and the irresistible impulses of the Spirit, have all the same tendency to destroy the necessity of good works.

Every man naturally desires the favour and protection of that Almighty Being in whose hands are the issues of life and death. But it is not surprising that such as despair of entering at the strait gate, by patient endurance in virtue and goodness, should seek after some shorter and pleasanter road to Heaven, some wider passage, that may let them through with all their errors and vices about them. And even in our own Church, which, disdaining all such arts and expedients, is con-

tented

tented with those terms of salvation which it has pleased the wisdom of God to offer to us, there often appears a disposition to abuse the Christian liberty we are trusted with, by evading some part of our duty. Let us search our own hearts, and consider how apt men are to mistake, or dissemble, what they owe to God and their brethren. In those matters which are held indifferent, how few are sufficiently attentive to the circumstances which make them become vicious or hurtful by the excess? It is easy to transgress the limits of prudence in the use of those pleasures which, of themselves, are innocent and natural, and which were intended, by Providence, for the relief of care and labour. It is not uncommon for many, who are unconscious of any impropriety in their conduct, to give themselves up to a life of amusement and dissipation. But, in these cases,
it

it is evident that they indulge an undue exercise of the liberty which God has given them over actions indifferent in themselves. Great caution and moderation are required, even in lawful things, to use them lawfully. For, in reality, the actions which we call indifferent, are not strictly and absolutely so, but are only regarded as such, when compared with others of greater importance. Times and circumstances have, and ought to have, a great influence upon our conduct. Hardly any action we do is so insignificant, but that it may be performed with more or less prudence and propriety. Whether a man allows himself, for once, some particular diversion is a matter of little consequence; but it would grow a very serious affair, should he repeat it so often as to interfere with his business or his duty. God has sent us into the world, not merely

to look about us and take our pleasure, but to worship him, to supply our own wants, and be useful to our fellow-creatures. He that has a family to provide for, a country to serve, a profession to follow, a mind to improve, and a fortune either to make or to be taken care of, is not at liberty to sacrifice such important objects to mere amusement. Even those who live in the greatest affluence, and seem placed by fortune above the cares and the business of the world, can never exempt themselves from their share of that dependence, and those services, which God exacts from all his reasonable creatures. The wealth and leisure in which they abound are not entirely their own: he that gave them expects that they should be spent with innocence, with prudence, and usefulness; which is a task requiring more thought and trouble than every one who wishes to be rich may

at

at first apprehend. Their friends, their neighbours, especially their poor neighbours, have claims upon them, which no man can neglect without suffering in his character, in his enjoyments, and in his reflections upon his own conduct. These, and many other particulars, together with the improvement of his own mind which a state of leisure and affluence should naturally lead to, which the world expects from him, as the peculiar duty of men of rank, and which, if neglected, will occasion contempt in others, and remorse and self-condemnation in himself, all these are perpetual checks upon that liberty which is allowed to us over indifferent things, and which we are apt to extend too far.

The last abuse of liberty I shall mention is, when men, not content with acting as they please themselves, affect to prescribe rules and limits to the actions and opini-

ons of others. This meddling and tyrannical temper appears but too frequently; and when trusted with power, and carried to excess, has occasioned more misery and wickedness in the world than any other cause. But if our Christian liberty be any thing more than a name, surely every follower of Christ has an equal title to it. The very claim that I make, under the words of the text, to a right of thinking and acting for myself, implies that my neighbour exactly has the same right, and in as large an extent; for the declaration is general, and every one is the object of it. Without looking back to those ages of barbarity and persecution, which were the disgrace of religion and of human nature, let us think it our happiness to live in an age of temper and moderation, when it is at last discovered, that the same God may be worshipped with some difference of form

form and language, without any temporal inconvenience, any breach of charity, or cutting each others throats. In us it would be particular impropriety to refuse to any that liberty which we exercise ourselves in a greater degree than any other nation upon earth; and let that liberty be extended as far as reason and the law of God will permit. Experience has taught us, that nothing can more improve the understanding of a people, and consequently their manners and virtue, than to leave them the privilege of thinking and acting as they please, in all cases where the right of our neighbour, and the public, can receive no injury. This, by frequent trials, affords opportunities of discovering what is right in opinion, and reasonable in practice. False reasonings, themselves, may sometimes teach the road to truth, by marking the deviations from

it; and the ill consequences of imprudent conduct are oftentimes the most effectual instruction that can be given to avoid or forsake it. Besides, without exercising this general liberty, we cannot know to what a height human improvements may be carried. The field that lies open to art and industry, appears to be hitherto inexhaustible; and, when a man's endeavours are led by inclination and liberty, difficulties of every kind are surmounted, and higher degrees of perfection are attained.

We are to show, in the third place, how these abuses of liberty are rectified or prevented, if by love we serve one another.

It was natural for a society that was united by so many ties as that of the primitive Christians, to feel a more than common regard for each other: they had the same Master, the same worship; were engaged in the same cause, and exposed to the

the same sufferings: and the minds of men are always most powerfully affected by these connexions at the beginning of a new institution, when they first engage in them. Besides this, it was also the particular precept of their Lord, inculcated in his life, and recommended at his death; the new commandment that he gave them, “that they should love one another.” This mutual love was absolutely necessary for their preservation, in a state of weakness and persecution, and was the source of the few comforts that were consistent with their situation. St. Paul recommends it to the Galatians as a remedy against those abuses of Christian liberty which men are very apt to indulge, even under the most humiliating circumstances. For, as love worketh no ill to its neighbour, it will necessarily stifle all those desires and actions which have any tendency to the

prejudice of our brethren. Love is manifested by a constant attention to serve and please them who are the objects of it. It adopts their interests ; it consults their humours and inclinations ; it excuses their weaknesses, and is glad to sacrifice any little advantage of its own, to obtain their praise and esteem. It will abridge its own legal and natural liberties, in compassion to the errors and prejudices of its brethren. “ If meat make my brother to offend,” saith St. Paul, with a noble warmth of benevolence, “ I will eat no flesh while
“ the world standeth, lest I make my
“ brother to offend.” And we need waste no time to prove, that a disposition which is so tender even of the infirmities of others, will be very cautious of doing any injury to their real rights and interests. But here some may object to us, that supposing it to be granted that love is a very
power-

powerful instrument in the performance of our duty ; yet, considering that it will not always rise at our command, and that it cannot operate where it is not, of what use can this precept be to those who feel no such passion in their breasts? To this we answer, that if they do not feel it, it is owing to an inexcusable want of observation and attention, and is so far their own fault. He that reflects but a little on the present scene of things, will see and feel that we are in some degree concerned in the happiness of our fellow-creatures, who have the same form, the same passions and appetites, the same powers of body and mind, and partake of the same conditions of life, the same joys and sufferings with ourselves ; and who have all received the same strong impression of the wisdom and goodness of their Creator. There will farther arise new motives for our benevolence

lence towards men who live in the same country, obeying the same laws, professing the same religion, and inheriting many ties of union and affection in the rights and customs and traditions of their ancestors. But, besides these general obligations to benevolence, we have usually the assistance of others that are nearer and more interesting. For, who are the persons whom we should be cautious not to offend by an abuse of our liberty? Those with whom we live and converse, with whom we transact business, with whom we share our amusements; some of whom have done us important services, and most of them many little offices of kindness: persons united to us by kindred, by friendship, by neighbourhood, by all the innumerable connexions of life that make men serviceable to one another. Surely there is not required from a reasonable mind any
great

great effort of affection to chuse to abstain from injuring or offending such objects as these, or even to take a pleasure in serving them. And suppose a man was so unnaturally formed, and so unlike the rest of his species, that he could feel no concern for the interests and happiness of his brethren, it would still be his duty to act as if he felt it, and to promote their interest and happiness. The task, indeed, would be painful, and harder than God usually requires of us; for he has not only made us capable of love and benevolence, but has implanted them in our hearts, in order to ease the burthen of our duty; and if we keep them clear from the seeds of malice and envy, and suffer them to grow up to their full maturity, and let charity have its perfect work, our duty will then be no burthen at all. Not only the abuses of liberty, but every other instance of sin
and

and weakness, will be easily subdued, and the commandments of our heavenly Father completely obeyed ; for love is the fulfilling of the law.

S E R M O N V I I I .

PSALM xxxvii. 7.

Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him : fret not thyself because of him that prospereth in his way.

OF all religious truths, there is none more readily and more universally acknowledged than the just and equitable administration of Providence : but then it is acknowledged only in a loose and general way ; for the particular instances of it are continually excepted to and disputed. It is easily enough admitted, that the remote parts of the world, which we are entire strangers to, are governed with the utmost wisdom ;

wisdom; but at home we hear nothing but complaints of hardship and injustice; of merit neglected, or not sufficiently rewarded: that those who are inferior to their neighbours in all other respects, are commonly before them in prosperity: that the good are passed over and despised; while the idle, the profligate, the unworthy, are sure to be the favourites of fortune and Providence. This is one of the innumerable instances we meet with that show how much self-love imposes upon reason; what partial, what unjust, what unqualified judges we are of almost every thing that relates to ourselves; and it is an instance in which the righteous themselves are sometimes included. “As
“for me,” saith the Psalmist, “my feet
“were almost gone, my steps had well
“nigh slipt; for I was envious at the
“foolish, when I saw the prosperity of
“the

“the wicked.” The Psalm from whence our text is taken, was composed on purpose to remove these unjust resentments; and the words we have chosen are such as condemn all kinds of vicious uneasiness arising in our minds at the prosperity of others, and which are comprehended under the name of Envy. We shall first show the unreasonableness of that passion in itself, and the mischief it occasions, which will explain the fitness of the precept, “Fret not thyself because of him that prospereth in his way:” and we shall prove, afterwards, that to “trust in the Lord, and wait patiently for him,” is the true remedy for that unhappy passion.

To be uneasy at the good fortune or happiness of another, considered simply in itself, and not as a diminution of our own, is, perhaps, beyond the power of human malice.

malice. It is only those advantages that are before the eyes of men, or almost within their reach, that fill their hearts with uneasiness, when they see them in the possession of others. No one ever thought of envying the glorious felicity of angels, or grew miserable at the enjoyments and honours that were obtained by a person in some former age, or in the most distant parts of the world. This passion seeks its food nearer home, and is nourished only by the prosperity of its neighbours, which some way or other, in the imagination of the envious, is always interpreted as a diminution of their own. He is seen only in the odious light of a rival who has intercepted the advantages that might otherwise have fallen to their share. His success is a silent reproach to their own want of industry or merit ; and even if he has gained no more than what they

they themselves have acquired long ago, yet they fancy that their own privileges must lose their value by being imparted to others, and made common. There is in most men a strange delight in pre-eminence, that makes them very unwilling to part with the most trifling or most imaginary superiority. And, if it is painful to many tempers to acknowledge themselves inferior, where the contention lies in matters of merè amusement and curiosity, we may easily conceive to what greater heights the same irritable passions may be inflamed, in cases where the preference is supposed to be attended with reputation and authority, and to give a title to the most considerable honours and rewards. Here, if we know mankind, we cannot but expect to see the whole partiality and injustice of self-love very strongly exerted. In such a situation, therefore, any kind of equality,

whether of birth, or riches, or profession, will appear a sufficient reason for keeping down others to the same level with themselves. At the same time, the advantages of superior prudence, abilities, application, or integrity, which may possibly make the whole difference of fortune, are either not valued, or not allowed of. These unjust opinions, this unfair consideration of their neighbour's case and their own, is the true source of envy, which, at first, is only a secret uneasiness in the breast that harbours it; but being continually nourished by fresh matter, the passion becomes more imperious and violent, preys upon and destroys all that goodness and humanity which was the natural growth of their hearts, and forms in the mind a gloomy mixture of hatred, rancour, discontent, and jealousy. These, when the venom within is sufficiently matured, disclose
them.

themselves in all the various kinds of offence and injury. Sometimes the secret arts of scandal and detraction are employed to lessen that merit and reputation which makes them miserable. Sometimes they indulge a more open and active hatred; opposing the interests, supporting the enemies, and ruining, by all possible means, the designs, the pretensions, and the character of their rival. No retaliation is thought sufficient, no revenge too severe to be inflicted on one who has made them appear less considerable to the world and themselves, by excelling them. But such a temper and such a conduct as this, by raising a spirit of retribution in those whom it injures, must occasion all its own malice and mischief to return upon itself. Thus, all the evil passions of a corrupt heart are inflamed, discord is perpetuated, and much misery is visibly

brought upon human life ; but very little in comparifon of what lies unfeen in the hearts of the envious and revengeful.

But fo faint and general a view of fuch diforders and calamities, is not fufficient to give a juft abhorrence of the vice they proceed from. It is neceffary to obferve, with care, the particular workings of it, and to fee how invariably it acts, in all circumftances, in oppofition to reafon, to humanity, and to our trueft interefts.

In the firft place, nothing can be more evidently unjuft than to envy thofe who have obtained no more than they deferve. It is a malignity of mind directly pointed againft virtue itfelf, to grudge that induftry and integrity fhould fometimes meet with their reward. For it is an obfervation confirmed by long experience, that the good things of this life are not always conferred on thofe who deferve them moft. The world

is

is not so fond of good men as to force its favours upon them. It should be considered that they are not upon an equal footing with the rest in their pretensions to temporal advantages. Many ways of rising that lie open to others, and those, perhaps, the shortest and the surest, are entirely shut to them. They have no hopes of favour from false and frivolous accomplishments, from deceit, from flattery, from a mean subserviency to the passions and pleasures of the Great. They have nothing to trust to but plain diligence and real capacity, and those always confined by innocence, and often concealed by modesty. Sometimes, indeed, they may be called forth, by fortune, from the obscurity they love; they may be placed, and maintain themselves, in eminent stations, especially in times of difficulty, when triflers find their own insignificance,

and give way to the abilities they cannot supply. But, whoever can envy the advantages they acquire in such situations, must, himself, be most incapable of acquiring them by the same ways. They who resemble and imitate them, will rejoice in their success, and comfort themselves that, even in this life, there is some reward for the righteous. And, indeed, if there is any state or condition in human life that deserves, above all the rest, not to be envied, but to be admired, applauded, and most ardently wished for, it is the state of prosperous and rewarded virtue. It is allowed, then, to be an injustice of the worst kind to envy the deserving, though, perhaps, there is hardly a vice more universally given into, even by many of the deserving themselves.

How few are there of those who excel in the arts and habits by which men are most

most eminently distinguished, who owe the beginning of their reputation to the candour and equity of those in the same profession? Their talents are commonly first observed by others of an inferior rank, who are the least qualified to judge of them, but who have no emulation, no interested motive, to make them suppress that sense of merit they cannot help feeling. Afterwards, indeed, when a fair character has been seen in different lights, and supported itself under repeated trials, and can be no longer disputed, it is at last unwillingly acknowledged. But, till then, the envious employ all their efforts to discourage the modest, and misrepresent the worthy; pretending to undervalue the talents they fear, seeking after private failings and blemishes, and spreading ill-natured and ill-grounded reports to darken a character that shines upon them with too

strong a light. Nor let the good expect, that, by the most great and glorious actions, by the longest perseverance in well-doing, they shall ever entirely put to silence the strife of tongues and the ingratitude of foolish men. In all ages, in all countries, the best and greatest men have found, by experience, that to serve and excel mankind, has not been the certain way to obtain their favour and applause. “Let them not be weary in well-doing, “for, in due season, they shall reap, if they “faint not.” The all-wise Disposer of honours and immortality will be their judge and rewarder, and, no doubt, has higher degrees of blessedness in store for those of whom the world was not worthy.

But if, in the second place, we suppose the persons envied not entirely to deserve the wealth or place that raises them above their superiors in merit, yet, even this

case

case does not afford a sufficient reason for envying them. For, where was their crime? They received the presents of favour and fortune, which the persons who envy them would have been, of all men, the least inclined to refuse. The fault, perhaps, was in those who patronised them; and we have reason to be displeased with it, if they had necessarily the gift of discerning spirits. But since they can only judge by appearances and reports; since, as men, we must allow them to be influenced by interest and prejudice; and since it is often a task of real difficulty to distinguish where the greatest merit lies, why should we be angry or surpris'd, if such fallible judges are sometimes deceived? And if we suppose them to be governed only by caprice, or by some more unworthy motive; yet, their actions, like all other events that seem to proceed
from

from chance, are still subject to the direction of that supreme benevolence which is able to make trifles useful, and vices themselves hurtful only to the guilty. It often happens, too, that the very persons who are seen in so contemptible a light, are much better qualified for their employments than those who envy them will allow. There are many men of a sober, reasonable character, who, without any shining qualities, have a sort of useful capacity for business, and, with their diligence and regularity, conduct it better than others of livelier imaginations, and more enlarged understandings. Those rare and eminent talents are but seldom wanted, even in the most eminent stations, and it is happy for states and kingdoms that they are not. They are frequently joined with great ambition and ungovernable passions, too apt to engage in selfish or extravagant pursuits,

purfuits, at the expence of the public interest. If they happen to be purified and adorned by piety and juſtice, happy indeed is the perſon poſſeſſed of them, and happy are thoſe whom he ſerves or governs ; but ſurely he has no reaſon to envy the lot of others, or be diſcontented with his own, in whatever ſtation of life it has pleaſed Providence to bleſs him with ſuch excellent endowments, and as long as the imenſe variety of nature lies open to the improvement of art and induſtry, he may be ſure of finding ſufficient employment for them. And there are pleaſures to be found in ſcience and contemplation, entirely diſtinct from the precarious profits that ſometimes attend them, and which the worldly-minded have not yet diſcovered. Surely, it is a truth not to be diſputed, that the very poſſeſſion and enjoyment of great virtues and great abilities,
are

are themselves a nobler blessing than any other they can pretend to, or procure for us. But men are never satisfied with the gifts that Heaven bestows upon them; nay, they commonly find reasons for discontentment in the very things that are given to make them happy. Thus, they who think themselves obliged to Providence for superior abilities, are apt to reckon it extremely hard that others, of less capacity, should be born to more wealth or honours. And yet, unless we destroy the most powerful and permanent motive to action and industry, and cut off the very root of property, the possessions acquired by a virtuous father must be allowed to descend to an unworthy son. Even the righteous themselves are too much inclined to repine at the enjoyments of the wicked, and to think themselves entitled to a larger share of those worldly goods they profess to despise.

despise. In all callings, in all professions, it is the constant practice to murmur at the supposed rewards and advantages that are to be met with in other ways of life. But the frequency of such reflections as these is a proof of their injustice. The divine beneficence is much more impartial in the distribution of its blessings than a superficial observer will allow. No man can raise himself to any high degree of happiness above the common measure, unless by being more pious, more charitable, and more contented than his brethren. If this truth and its consequences are attended to, it must appear, in the third place, mean and unworthy the character of a good man, to envy the wicked any advantages they can gain by being so. Yet it must be confessed that, upon a slight view of things, these will always appear the most just and natural objects of envy. Every
one

one feels an indignation rising within, that he is hardly able to suppress, when he is forced to behold the prosperity of unworthy men. It is so agreeable to every sentiment of the human heart, that virtue should be joined with happiness, and vice with misery, that we cannot help being displeased when we meet with instances to the contrary. The good, in all ages, appear to have been moved with this kind of resentment, and, among the heathen, it was held a virtue to indulge it. The Psalmist owns himself to have been greatly infected with this weakness, for a weakness it really was, as he afterwards discovered. "I was envious," says he, "at
" the foolish, when I saw the prosperity
" of the wicked. They are not in trouble
" as other men, neither are they plagued
" like other men. When I thought to
" know this, it was too painful for me.

" So

“ So foolish was I and ignorant. I was as
“ a beast before thee, until I went into the
“ sanctuary of God, then understood I
“ their end.” But this unjust distribution
of the goods of fortune, which we are so
apt on every occasion to condemn, we
still must allow to be God’s own work,
and one part of the immense scheme of
Providence. If it appears at any time
harsh or inexplicable to our imperfect rea-
son, we ought neither to wonder nor com-
plain. The divine goodness has many
ways of justifying itself that lie beyond
the reach of human wisdom. If we be-
lieve the present life to be a state of dis-
cipline and probation, the inequalities
that disturb us may very naturally be
supposed to fall in with, and make a part
of it. And there are many arguments to
be drawn from the condition of human
life, and the real nature of things, which
may

may help very much to appease the indignation we are so ready to feel on this account. For let us calmly enquire whether fortunate bad men do really deserve all the envy the world bestows upon them. If they do, we certainly ought, to exert the passion impartially, to envy the whole of their condition, and all that contributes to form and maintain it. They who wish for their power and influence, should ask themselves whether they would wish to obtain them by the same servile and dishonest arts; whether they would willingly be possessed of as large a fortune, upon condition that they should waste it in a manner as injurious to their health, and innocence, and character? Whether they would exchange the friendships and reputation, the useful talents and honest industry of an inferior condition, for the trifling and corrupt manners, the everlasting idleness,

ness, the want of sincerity, and the neglect of all improvement, which are qualities too often attending that wealth and and pre-eminence which seem such natural objects of their envy. The generality of men would think upon these subjects with greater justness, if they would but remember that there is a wide difference between the possession of wealth and power, and the enjoyment of them. The poor are ignorantly apt to imagine that their betters have always the same lively relish of their ease and affluence which they themselves experience, at a season of feasting and relaxation; not considering, that custom continually lessens pleasure, and satiety totally extinguishes enjoyment. They also, to whom Providence has given a large fortune, without the heart or the prudence to use it, must continually find it a disgrace and incumbrance, and may

be apt to wonder what they are envied for. It is certain too, that any misfortune or vexation, whatever raises a present uneasiness, must employ the mind entirely, while it lasts, and not suffer it to attend to the agreeable part of its condition. Now, bad men, however fortunate they may have been in many respects, are at least as liable as others to the common accidents of life. They are equally apt to be stung by disgrace or ingratitude ; to be dejected by melancholy, ill health, or disappointed views. We are greatly mistaken, and so was the Psalmist, when he said of the wicked, " They are not in trouble like other men, " neither are they plagued as other men." They feel, like others, the loss of favour and character, the want of duty or merit in their children, and all domestic unhappiness ; nay, as they aim at more, and covet more than other men, the obstacles

and disappointments they meet with, are usually greater and more impatiently born. Besides all this, there is often some invisible mischief that lurks within, and preys as it were upon the vitals of the wicked, which leaves them no enjoyment of riches or honours, and will not suffer them to be happy amidst all the means and instruments of happiness. This secret bosom-evil, this inward discontentment, and incapacity of being truly pleased, whether owing to the immediate chastisement of Heaven, or to a wounded conscience, to sad reflections on the ills they have done, the misery they have caused, the recompense they have received, and that which they still expect; this evil, I say, is constantly working within, and sometimes grows too strong for all the power of dissimulation to conceal it. It betrays itself in their unhappy looks and

countenances; in their restless change of company, place, and employment; in their continually seeking after peace, and finding none: "For there is no peace, "saith the Lord, to the wicked. When "thou, O Lord, with rebukes, dost chasten man for sin, thou makest his beauty," his joys, his talents, his health, of body and mind, "to consume away, like "as it were a moth fretting a garment."

Let us confess, therefore, that Providence has many ways in its power to deprive those of the enjoyment of its gifts, who have rendered themselves unworthy of them. Nay, I could almost venture to say, that as great and as judicial a punishment as any bad men suffer in this life, is to find themselves thus cheated and deceived; to perceive that their injustice and falsehood, that all the miseries they have caused and felt, have at last only procured for them a false

false and treacherous felicity; that, in the midst of luxury, they live uneasy and unentertained; in the height of power, spiritless and dejected; and conceal a restless, discontented heart beneath an insipid ostentation of wealth and pleasure. Wise, therefore, and reasonable, is the advice of the Psalmist, to such as are unhappy at the prosperity of their neighbours; “Rest
“in the Lord, and wait patiently.” Perhaps, the disorders that distress them have no reality, but are the mere effect of their own selfishness and vanity, of their unfair opinions, or unreasonable expectations. Perhaps, the happiness they envy, is only concealed misery, or at best some vain superficial finery, which is more enjoyed by the spectators than the owners. At worst, all will be set right at last. We may safely trust the wisdom of him that governs the world. “Shall not the Judge of the

“whole earth do right?” He certainly best knows the true interests of virtue, with what rewards it may be most encouraged, and to what trials and difficulties it may be usefully exposed. He is the friend of virtue, in an infinitely nobler sense than the best of men can be called so; he is always employing the wisdom of Providence, and the powers of nature in cherishing, forming, and supporting it; in rewarding it, or in preparing rewards for it. All the powers, and parts, and orders of the universe are continually working together for good to them that fear him; but then they work in a silent, slow, mysterious manner, such as becometh the majesty of inscrutable wisdom. The belief that all human affairs are for ever subject to this divine administration, must fill the minds of the good with that confidence and security which is an essential part of happiness,
and

and dispel those painful melancholy apprehensions which are so apt to spring up amidst scenes of misery and disorder. This belief, in particular, is well adapted to cure the ungenerous passion we have been treating of, and to ease the heart of that restless, dishonest anguish arising from it.

And if to this we add, the uncertain and unsatisfactory nature of the goods of fortune which men are ever struggling and contending for; that they must often be purchased at the expence of health, reputation, and innocence; that the pursuit of them is usually inconsistent with the true enjoyments of life; that those who obtain them are still subject to all the vices and weaknesses they had before, and being neither mended in temper nor understanding, retain within them the same principles of discontent and unhappiness:

O 4

I say,

I say, he that can think of the goods of fortune in this reasonable manner, will be able, without repining, to see others in possession of its greatest pomp and splendours. Let it be considered too, by those who value their peace of mind, how much it must be lessened by that malevolent, grudging spirit which finds a misfortune in every instance of happiness it sees. Other passions, if successful in their aims, procure, at least, some pleasures or amusements; but envy produces nothing but pure unqualified misery; and the stronger the passion, the misery is always the greater. Then, how odious and disgraceful must the office be to a mind in which the sense of humanity is not quite extinguished, to rob the deserving of their reward, and the world of their services; to look with spite and uneasiness on conspicuous talents, and successful industry; on the best qualities
and

and enjoyments of mankind; to hate whatever is amiable, or excellent, beyond the common lot! The only pretence for so unmanly and execrable a vice is the undeserved prosperity of bad men. But we have the word of truth itself that their prosperity is false and transitory, and that they will be no gainers in the end. Upon this assurance, let us “rest in the Lord, “and wait patiently;” let us promote and share, as far as we are able, the happiness of our neighbour; particularly, let us show an open and generous sense of early merit and virtuous diligence; and, avoiding all appearances of that jealous, constrained, incommunicative disposition, which can never hope to be beloved, let us view, with a friendly applause, the growing talents and characters of those who are engaged in the same course with ourselves; contributing our own parts to the public interests

interests of learning and religion, and glad to see those interests advanced by the labours even of our rivals; without being apprehensive lest, in this vale of sorrow, any one should very much deserve our envy.

S E R M O N IX.

Psalm xix. 12, 13.

Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me; then I shall be upright, and be innocent from the great transgression.

IT is evidently implied in the first part of the text, that men are liable to commit many faults, without perceiving them to be so, and which yet may justly be imputed to them. “Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults.” What are the causes of this blame-

blameable ignorance, we shall consider in the first part of our discourse. The words which we translate “ presumptuous sins,” are rendered by the Septuagint, “ the sins “ of other men:” and this meaning we chuse to adhere to, because, upon the whole, it seems more agreeable to the context; and shall enquire, secondly, what are the circumstances that make us partakers of, and answerable for, the sins of others. And we shall show, in the last place, that the avoiding the crimes the Psalmist so earnestly prays against, our own secret faults, and the guilt we may contract by others wickedness, is the strongest proof of our integrity, and the perfection of our moral character: “ Then shall I be “ upright, and be innocent from the great “ transgression.” We are to consider first, to what causes this ignorance of our secret faults may be imputed.

It

It is a very considerable part of the knowledge of ourselves to know how far we have performed those duties which our heavenly Father requires of us ; and there seems to be nothing difficult in the thing itself ; for the laws to which his gracious wisdom has subjected us are neither unintelligible nor intricate ; they are not built, like human laws, on many separate foundations, rendered obscure by time, and inconsistent by the prevalence of different views and interests ; but they are clear and simple, founded on a few of those plain principles of reason which continually offer themselves to every honest mind, and are easily applicable to all the diversities of action and situation in human life. Agreeably to the character the Psalmist gives of them, “ The statutes of the Lord are right, and
“ rejoice the heart ; the commandment of
“ the Lord is pure, and giveth wisdom
“ unto

“unto the simple.” To comprehend them nothing more is requisite than the same degree of understanding and attention that makes men qualified for the most necessary and common employments. And as far as we comprehend them, so far we are certainly very competent judges whether we obey them. Yet, when we observe the conduct of others, or reflect upon our own, we cannot help discovering many instances, and many more no doubt escape us, where we offend, through inadvertence, at once against our duty and against our knowledge. The mind of man is so formed by its Author, as to delight in the possession of truth, and is abundantly furnished with the means and capacity to discover it; especially those truths which concern its own conduct and welfare; but it is, at the same time, so liable to be clouded by passion, or biased by interest, or drawn

drawn by example, that it does not always listen to the voice of reason, which it ought to obey. The criminal excesses so common amongst youth, when they enter, ignorant and unguarded, into the world, are most of them, no doubt, condemned by their own consciences; but they offend, in many instances, with such apparent ease and unconcern, as if they had no suspicion of any thing blameable in their conduct. There is so strange a power in example, that it often moves them to do the very things they despise, and follow what they most disapprove: and if, instead of contending with the passions, it happens to flatter and inflame them, its influence grows almost irresistible. When bad example becomes more general, it takes the name of Custom and Fashion; and not only pretends to be innocent, but assumes a kind of authority, which to dispute or oppose,

oppose, is held want of sense or experience. If any remorse was at first raised by the clear sense of duty, which is natural to a heart not yet corrupted, it only passes for a prejudice of education; it is immediately stifled by shame or passion, and entirely lost and forgot in the pursuit of pleasure. And thus men may grow unjust in many instances, and voluptuous and irreligious in the whole tenour of their lives, and at the same time imagine that they are only maintaining the decencies of their character, or spending the superfluities of their fortune in innocent amusements. Nor is our sense of duty only liable to be effaced by the strong impressions of public example: every bad habit that we contract, every unjust passion we indulge, every sordid interest we pursue, are continually employed in weakening the force, and darkening the evidence of the

the

the good principles they contradict. There is commonly a secret bosom sin, with which men are most easily beset, which, to the sense of an indifferent person, appears as evident a breach of the law we profess to live by as any other; but the malignity of it is very little perceived, hardly suspected, and never clearly understood by him that indulges it. The favourite wickedness lies concealed, and guarded, in the midst of subtleties and evasions, doubts and ignorance; and, while it subdues and commands, like a lawless tyrant, all other appetites and faculties, will never suffer its own title to be examined. It is even possible, that by a careless habit of life, a man may increase this self-delusion to such a degree, as to be guilty of transgressing almost every branch of his duty, without distinctly perceiving that he disobeys any single part of it.

The awful veneration we owe to the Sovereign Author of Nature, is not only a chief and essential duty in itself, but the very fountain of all religion, the true source of whatever is good and virtuous in man. And where this veneration is as real and sincere as it ought to be, it will always express itself, with a suitable reverence, in acts of private and public devotion. What acts of piety men perform in private, as we cannot know, we ought not to censure: "He that sees and he that judges is the Lord." But we have too good reason to say, without any breach of charity, that public worship is very unjustly neglected, and very meanly thought of by many who desire to be held honest and virtuous themselves, and by most of those who govern the world by their example. To despise, avoid, and almost entirely neglect, every public institution
of

of divine worship, is held no immorality, no imputation upon a man's character; it is well if it be allowed by some, who pretend to think a little more seriously, to be an excusable omission of the meanest part of our duty: and yet we exhort you to join in no prayers but such as our heavenly Father has promised to hear; such as, if granted, must make us every day better, both in heart and mind, and qualified for every kind of happiness that Providence has prepared for us. We offer up no praises but to the first and most excellent of all Beings, and none but such as are suitable to those adorable perfections which are marked out to us in his holy word, and in all the glorious works of his hands. We own too, that devotion may be looked upon as a secondary part of duty, if compared with the most meritorious and difficult examples of virtue;

but it is still a duty which no man ever neglected with impunity, without suffering considerably both in his happiness and in his character. The neglect of it certainly brings on a carelessness and indifference in the practice of other duties ; and there is reason to fear this carelessness may, in time, corrupt the most valuable parts of our nature, our justice, and humanity.

Let devotion, then, be allowed no higher regard than its usefulness can claim ; let it give way, if they happen to interfere, to acts of righteousness and mercy ; but let it not be superseded by indolence, by fashion, by every trifling or criminal pleasure. The duties, indeed, which we owe to our neighbour, are what men, in general, allow themselves to be most concerned to perform ; and we, therefore, find them, not only pretending to justice and integrity, but openly professing the most candid

candid and generous sentiments. Yet we cannot help concluding, from what we see in common life, that their charity towards one another is at least as superficial and defective, as their piety to their Maker. For, what high opinion can we entertain of the love men bear to one another, when the least difference in interest or opinion is commonly of more force than the ties of relation and friendship? How unreasonably warm are their contentions, when any little advantage is the subject of them? How easily are they disposed to hate and injure the persons who happen to oppose their views? How readily, and almost invariably, do their opinions follow their interest? Even charity, itself, too often gives us reason to suspect the truth of its motives, when the same hand which relieves the poor, detains the profits of the tradesman, and

the hire of the servant. How many mean artifices are there in the conduct of business and advancement of fortune, which men of reputation continually stoop to use? In many offices and employments, what was at first acknowledged to be fraud and dishonesty, by the privilege of custom acquires a better name; and the long practice and regular method of the iniquity, is thought a sufficient justification of it. Such instances as these make it happy for mankind that the security of their rights and properties does not depend on their religion or mutual good-will.

But the strongest proof how easily men slide into vicious practices, when they meet with countenance and impunity, are the notorious breaches of decency, justice, and charity, which the violent of all parties indulge without the least remorse. How difficult a task is it to most men to
think

think well of, to allow any real merit, or do any good office to those who are engaged in principles and interests opposite to their own? And yet this is no more than what reason and humanity may often require us to allow to our avowed enemies. It must be owned, indeed, that Religion, which was formerly the source of the warmest contentions and animosities, ought not to be reckoned, of late years, among the causes of our dissensions: and this would even be a proof of our improvement, if it was a mark that the truth was at last discovered, and universally assented to; or, that we had learned to treat that sacred subject with a becoming moderation and charity. But is that really the case; or is it not, rather, that Religion is not held a matter considerable enough to be much concerned for? Your own observation and experience must readily sug-

gest to you, that the instances of vicious practice we have mentioned, are not indeed such as truly good men are subject to; for that would be a contradiction; but they are such as are generally consented to and pursued by persons of some character, by persons who think themselves not void of virtue and religion, and who seem not to perceive they are criminal in practising these very things. To them, therefore, they are of the same nature with those secret sins the pious Psalmist prays so earnestly to be kept from.

It would be easy to reckon up innumerable others, such as the mirth and malice with which men usually make their neighbour's reputation the amusement of their idle hours; those peevish and perverse dispositions, which perpetually poison the happiness of others, and their own; the excessive love of pleasure, and the inconsiderate

siderate waste of time, which are so mischievous and yet so common. The multitude of crimes proceeding from such principles as these, are generally very little attended to, or forgot as soon as committed; and no account is kept of them but at that great tribunal which shall one day pass sentence, with the most impartial and discerning justice, upon every part of their lives; not according to the fond imperfect notions they vainly form of their own merit, but from the clearest view of all their actions and designs. Many blameable actions, committed by ourselves, are continually apt to escape our attention; and we are still more apt to be ignorant of those committed by other men, which are often so influenced by, or connected with our own, as to be in some respect imputable to us; and this was the second thing we undertook to prove.

Our

Our all-merciful Father seems to have employed every possible tie in uniting mankind together, which might strengthen the common bond of society. We are not only held together by our mutual wants and interests, but even our manners and characters, our very merits and capacities, depend upon one another, upon those with whom we live and converse familiarly. There is a powerful principle of imitation in men, which leads them insensibly to follow the customs and practices they see continually, as appears from the general strokes of resemblance so often observed in the characters of those of the same profession. In the beginning of life, example and authority are the only guides we are capable of following; with which most are so well contented that they never enquire after any other. As far, therefore, as one man's actions are naturally, and almost

almost necessarily influenced by those of others, so far they who set the example, may justly impute to themselves the good or evil that attends the imitation of it. How far the contagion of a single wicked action may extend, how many may be corrupted by it, and to what degrees, is impossible exactly to compute; which proves that sinners may often have much more than they suspect, to answer for.

Every kind of example is in its own nature contagious; but the example that is given to men by their superiors, by parents, or governors, by such as are eminent in power, riches, or reputation, leaves a more lasting and forcible influence on their behaviour. There is a dignity of sentiment becoming the character of the monarch after God's own heart, in this petition of David we are now considering. He was the chief magistrate, the
commander,

commander, and the lawgiver of a great people. The pattern he set, he knew would form the manners of his own age, and leave an impression on the minds and characters of his countrymen, which might last through many generations. It was a piety very suitable to him whose actions were of such great and public importance, to pray that they might be harmless at least, such as might be imitated without making him guilty of the sins of other men. Had David himself been voluptuous or profane, it is hard to conceive what a general depravity might have been propagated by the example of a victorious king, through a people that owed their riches, their reputation, and their empire to him. Suppose his power and great abilities had been exerted to suppress and discountenance that religion they so eminently supported and adorned: suppose his fruitful genius, his pathetic
and

and sublime imagination, instead of singing the wonders of Nature and Providence, and celebrating the beauty of holiness, had been employed in disguising vice, or recommending pleasure; in reasoning against devotion, or ridiculing it; in establishing the worship of many gods, or the contempt of all. Jeroboam, one of his successors, but in all respects greatly inferior to him, by erecting altars, and worshipping his golden calves, a kind of deities not likely, one would think, to gain many votaries, induced such multitudes to follow his royal example, that he is said, in Scripture, to have “made the whole people of Israel to sin.” And it is remarkable that the people were, with great difficulty, cured of this particular sort of idolatry, and not without frequent relapses. Nothing is more easy and expeditious than the propagation of wickedness,

ness, when the infection is taken from the highest ranks of life. A few prostitute slaves are always ready to flatter and assist the vilest appetites, and justify the worst excesses of their master, as far as their imitation can do it. These are commonly mistaken for great men, by the ignorant world, who are dazzled with their finery at a distance, but see neither their meanness nor their misery. And thus, by happening to stand in an eminent place, those may be looked upon as patterns to be followed by the public, whose frivolous talents, in another situation, would have been too obscure for contempt. The careless and thoughtless part of mankind, do immediately what they see done by such as they ignorantly think their betters, without seeking any other reason. Many will be glad to find themselves justified by the example of the great in indulging the
vicious

vicious appetites, which before, they thought it for their credit to restrain. Many will find in themselves new passions and strange desires, which would never have appeared, if they had not been kindled by the wickedness of their neighbours. Weak minds are easily inclined to think they shall be innocent, or at least excusable, in following the steps of those who are called their superiors. Some will be as wicked as those above them, out of flattery, and to make a fortune; and some out of vanity, and to make a figure. And the farther the corrupt example extends, the more irresistible it grows, till, at last, it becomes singular, and almost scandalous, not to comply with it. Now, though in all these cases, it is highly criminal in men to imitate the evil practices they observe and condemn in others, yet some part of the guilt must necessarily fall upon those
whose

whose example gave the temptation and encouragement; and a still larger share must belong to them, if their station and authority naturally make them looked upon by their inferiors as guides and patterns of behaviour. Thus, masters of families, when they have corrupted their servants by their bad example, may be justly considered as guilty of their idleness and intemperance. Thus, parents are, in the strongest manner, answerable for all the bad impressions made by their own vices on the minds of their children. But these, in general, make themselves guilty of others wickedness by accident; by setting a bad example, and leaving them at liberty to follow it. There are others who share in the crimes of their neighbours more deeply and deliberately; who stir up their criminal passions, or invent and furnish the means to gratify them; who are employed

ployed in betraying the weakness, abusing the confidence, and destroying the innocence of their fellow creatures. But then, they who take so much pains to partake of other men's sins, will never, like the pious Psalmist, pray to be delivered from them.

It requires some love of piety, and some proficiency in it, before men can struggle with their vices, and wish in earnest to be freed from them. And, perhaps, human nature, when it has attained to as great perfection as it is capable of, can give no stronger proof of it than the having no secret sins to answer for, and the being no ways concerned in, no ways accessory to the vices of other men. "So
" shall I be undefiled and innocent of the
" great offence;" which was the third thing we undertook to prove. That men commit numberless sins, without reflecting

that they are so, is owing to the want of that attention over their conduct to which every reasonable creature stands obliged. Whoever is in general careless or negligent of his behaviour, besides the plain and obvious transgressions of his duty, must, of necessity, contract many unperceived errors and weaknesses, which increase in strength and number by being neglected, and often form very dangerous habits. Consequently, to be subject only to a few of these errors and weaknesses (for it is impossible to be entirely free from them) must be the mark of a mind full of carefulness and circumspection, and very constantly attentive to its own improvement in piety. Now, this state of watchfulness and consideration, is the most essential part of a religious character. Nothing more is required to the performance of our duty, than to exercise our reason, and watch

watch over our conduct with as great exactness as we are capable of. It is to be considered too, that the secret vices which are most apt to escape us, must necessarily be of an inferior nature. Nobody can be guilty of injustice or intemperance, in their most flagrant instances, without perceiving it. For it would be a most preposterous kind of wickedness, to be exact in the lesser parts of our duty, and to think the weightier matters of the law, the only part of it not worth our observance. We may therefore reasonably presume, that they who are religiously diligent in fulfilling all inferior obligations, will, at least, be equally careful in their performance of the greatest. And it will be another strong proof of the integrity of their lives, if those who have lived within the view and influence of their conduct, have never been tainted nor infected by it.

Q 2

It

It is almost a perfect character alone, to say of a man, that he has set an example, which nobody has been the worse for following. Indeed, how few are there to be found, who have known how to live with their superiors, without heightening their vanity and vices by complying with them? who have preserved a just command over the unguarded freedoms that are used in conversing with their equals, and have formed no friendships, and aimed at no pleasures, but such as are consistent with innocence? who have never helped to corrupt the manners of their inferiors, by joining in such ill examples as they are always too much inclined to follow? But the obligations we are under to preserve the innocence of our neighbours, implies something more than the being simply innocent ourselves. To declare some opinions, that are certainly true; to
use

use some liberties that are indisputably lawful, may often have a dangerous effect upon those weak minds who mean better than they are able to reason. "Take heed," says St. Paul, "lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak. Through thy knowledge shall a weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?" But certainly that piety which is first pure, by being exempt from any part in other men's vices, should next be perfect, by having none of its own to answer for. Nay, the true spirit of religion must, of necessity, first begin to exert itself at home, by forming the temper and affections of good men, before it can extend their views abroad, and watch, with a charitable care, over the behaviour of their neighbours. This, therefore, we may look upon as one of those eminent proofs of kindness

Q 3

and

and good will to mankind, which can never be given but by “faints upon the earth, and such as excel in virtue.”

And this leads us to the very conclusion we proposed to make—that to be cleansed from our own secret faults, and from the sins of others, is a mark that we have attained to no common degree of piety, and are, in the whole of our character, undefiled, and innocent, from any great offence. The Psalmist, with no less wisdom than piety, applied to the divine grace for these excellent gifts, the former of which is an eminent proof of inward virtue and integrity; and the latter, of that public-minded charity and benevolence, which seeks its own happiness in that of its fellow creatures. May we all of us be like minded, and may our pious petitions for the same excellent graces be as well rewarded,

SER-

S E R M O N X.

HOSEA, vi. 3.

*Then shall we know if we follow on to
know the Lord.*

AS true religion depends upon nourishing good principles and pious affections in our hearts, and establishing virtuous habits in our conduct; our progress and improvement in it must necessarily be slow and gradual. It is beyond the common power of nature to work a sudden and total change in the characters of men; to alter settled ways of thinking, and immediately turn a long course of action out

of its accustomed channel. And though the grace of God has sometimes produced instantaneous and wonderful effects, yet that is not its usual method of operation. It commonly works upon our minds in an imperceptible manner, co-operating with our own endeavours, to produce the fruits of righteousness and love, and hardly distinguishable from them. “ So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast
“ seed into the ground, and should sleep,
“ and rise night and day, and the seed
“ should spring and grow up, he heedeth
“ not how.” As the seed takes root in the hidden bosom of the earth, and pushes forth the blade, and increases continually till the corn be ripe, in such a manner as no one can observe its progress; so the growth of grace, in good men, though it be perpetually improving, yet it can never be perceived till they begin to bring

bring forth its fruits, and taste its blessings. And this dispensation of Providence, like all the rest, is evidently wise and useful; for we are excited to greater industry and attention, till we find ourselves certain of success, and our virtue becomes more stable and secure by being founded on habit and perseverance. But weak and wicked men, though upon the whole they can never frustrate the eternal counsels of Heaven; yet, in particular instances, they often render them useless, nay, pernicious to themselves.

There are many of light minds, yet not without some regard to religion, who, after a few faint inconstant efforts to shake off their vices, perceiving no immediate alteration in themselves, entirely give up the cause, and rashly despair of growing better. " Their goodness is as a morning cloud," and " as the early dew it goeth away."

There

There are also many good men, who, partly from temper and constitution, partly from outward accidents and temptations, meet with so many obstructions in the paths of virtue, as make them very doubtful whether they advance or not. And in general there are so many failings inseparable from human nature, whether owing to the surprizes of sudden passion, or the effects of carelessness and custom, that the best can never be entirely satisfied with their condition, or perfectly secure of its continuance. But yet God has not left himself nor his laws without a witness in our hearts. Prejudice and dishonesty may confound the differences of right and wrong, but a sincere mind will always be able to separate them ; and true goodness, wherever it is, will always discover itself by evident marks and traces, such as may give the righteous sufficient assurance to
rejoice

rejoice in their improvement. What is the nature of those marks, and how we are to seek for them, we may learn in general from the words of the text. The prophet is inviting the Israelites to repentance: "Come, and let us return unto the Lord," says he, "for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." And lest they should question the efficacy of their endeavours, because they perceived no immediate success of them; lest the slowness of their growth in goodness should make them doubt the reality of it, he assures them, that "then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord." He exhorts them to patience, and refers the matter to experience. This is perfectly agreeable to that method of instruction, by which wisdom is represented in Eccclus as training up her son. "At the first she will walk
with

“ with him by crooked ways, and bring
“ fear and dread upon him, and torment
“ him with her discipline, until she may
“ trust his soul, and try him by her laws.
“ Then will she return the strait way unto
“ him, and comfort him, and shew him
“ her secrets.”

The pious endeavours of a sincere man may at first appear irksome and fruitless, but in their due time they will always have a proportionable influence on the temper and disposition. It may be impossible to determine how much a single good action contributes to the reforming a corrupt inclination, or changing a vicious habit: yet, after a long perseverance in such actions, we shall have sufficient proof that the inclination is reformed, and the habit changed. Hence a good man, by considering his present, and recollecting his past state, may have ample confidence that his labour has not been in vain; and
by

by observing the particular alterations in his conduct and character, he will easily know in what instances, and to what degrees his reformation has prevailed. Such a discovery will afford him a sort of satisfaction and relief, like what a traveller feels from knowing how far he is advanced, and what yet remains of his journey.

The delight that arises from the sense of growing better is a just reward of virtuous industry, and a strong encouragement to aim at higher excellence, to try what are the utmost advantages that piety can bestow. Consequently, if, by any method or observation, we may be able to trace more distinctly the steps of our religious improvement, it will be well worth our while to attend to it. In the following discourse we shall endeavour to give some direction and assistance towards such an enquiry, putting together such
general

general rules as are laid down in Scripture, or may be collected from the experience of good men, and leaving the application of them to the circumstances and the discretion of particular persons.

In the first place, it would be evidently absurd for any to enquire into their advancement in goodness, unless they really and sincerely desire to be good; and this implies a great deal more than sinners, perhaps, may imagine. It implies that they firmly resolve to forsake all their vices, and to “have no more fellowship with the un-
“fruitful works of darkness.” They must abhor that which is evil, and strive to abstain even from all appearance of evil. This resolution will, no doubt, prove too weak to govern their conduct in every instance, especially if they are but newly recovered from a vicious state; it will sometimes be overborn by the force of
passion,

passion, and sometimes undermined by the deceitfulness of sin ; but yet this is the only solid basis of all virtue, the true boundary that separates the good from the bad. For as long as the minds of men are determined to what is wrong, or undetermined whether they shall quit it, they are evidently on the side of wickedness. •

We have not attained to the lowest degree of righteousness, till we have settled in our minds a constant purpose of obeying the pure and perfect will of God in its full extent. God has not given us an arbitrary collection of commands, but a complete scheme of duty founded on truth and reason; and contrived to make us as happy as our wants and circumstances can bear. All the parts of it conspire in one excellent design, and none can be omitted without a prejudice to the whole. We must believe the great mystery of our redemption,

demption, and acknowledge and trust in the merits of our Redeemer; but neither this, nor fasting and prayer added to it, can excuse us from doing justice and loving mercy. In all our actions, in all our words, we should have a strict regard to truth and honesty; but that cannot exempt us from the offices of brotherly love, or make amends for intemperance, or justify the want of faith or devotion. Our hearts are deceived and corrupted; our understanding itself is dishonest, if we labour to contract the law of righteousness to our own partial views and affections. That singleness of mind which never seeks to deface or alter, but only to discover and comply with the true terms of duty, is a qualification absolutely requisite in every candidate for holiness. And, wherever this disposition has been encouraged for any time, we may be certain, even whether

ther we perceive it or no, that there must have been a change for the better.

We acknowledge it a very difficult task and tedious work, to unravel vicious habits, and recover a command over appetites that have not been used to obey ; so difficult, as to give just grounds for that strong figure of the Prophet, “ Can the “ Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also “ do good, who are accustomed to do “ evil.” But this, no doubt, is to be understood of that extreme degree of iniquity in which reason and all the powers of the soul are enslaved to sin, and men have learnt to do wickedly out of principle ; for the world is not yet so bad, but we frequently see many reform their lives in some particulars, even where their crimes have been great and habitual. If the understanding has preserved, or can recover, a

sense of duty, if the will and resolution can be engaged in so good a cause, we need never despair of success; all will be right, if we can wait till patience has had her perfect work. Our appetites may be strong and stubborn, but they are not inflexible; they may make an obstinate resistance, but they must be subdued at last. God, in the constitution of our frame, has made reason the governing principle, and given to it a just authority over all our actions: it is the interpreter of the divine will; we cannot but acknowledge its commands to be lawful; we cannot but approve ourselves when we obey them. It is then we feel ourselves in our natural state, and enjoy the true rest and peace of our souls. God has directed and enlightened our minds by his holy revelations; he has promised us the divine admonitions and hidden comfort of his Spirit.

Spirit. We are born to virtue and piety ; the best end of our being, the only worthy employment of our lives. And shall we doubt of our abilities to attain that state to which nature has formed us ; that state which Heaven invites and assists us to attain ? If we have but the courage to persevere, we shall soon be satisfied that we are engaged in no impracticable task ; we shall obtain another mark of our improvement, by being convinced that we actually gain ground upon our vices, and are less and less in their power. Our passions will grow more pliant and gentle, and, at length, accustom themselves to subjection. The things that before made the deepest impression on our hearts, the pleasures of youth and sense, the bewitching example of our companions, and our bosom sin, which doth so easily beset us, will, by degrees, lose their relish and influence.

R 2

It

It is happy for mankind that they are not so formed as to receive delight from only one kind of objects. Whatever business they apply themselves to in earnest, they will, in time, grow satisfied with it, and fond of it. Do not let sinners imagine that their enjoyments are owing purely to their wickedness; for whatever they may think, they would meet with full as many in any other way; even in the exercise of religion itself, if they could follow it with the same application. The cheerfulness of poverty is a plain proof that much pleasure may be had at small expence; and the contented minds of good men show, that happiness has no necessary connection with sin or folly. They, therefore, who have tasted the first sweets of piety will, no doubt, be inclined to proceed; and it will be a great argument that they do proceed, if they find

find themselves free from that pernicious modesty which often forces men to sin, even against inclination and knowledge, because they cannot refuse the sollicitation, or bear the contempt of their equals. To guard our morals, we must sometimes be obstinate and unsociable: for, as abandoned impudence is usually the companion of incorrigible vice, so a prudent confidence and firmness of mind is, in many cases, the best guardian of innocence.

We shall yet have stronger reason to rejoice in our success, if we find that we gain ground over those sordid passions which are apt to grow stronger as men advance in years, and engage in business. Sinners, in their early days, are fickle and irresolute. They follow as they are led by passion and pleasure, without any constant purpose of action. Afterwards, their vices grow more regular and determined.

R 3

They

They form to themselves a method and system of iniquity, pressing with a constant endeavour towards interest, wealth, and power, and engaging in the cares of the world, to obtain the pride of life. If, therefore, we have recovered ourselves, in a great degree, from the very vices that are incident to our age and station; if our designs and expectations are moderate, suitable to our circumstances, and consistent with our duty; if, in that conflict and opposition of interest which must unavoidably arise between many who have nearly the same views, we can contend without anger, or be outdone without envy; if losses and disappointments do not sink deep in our hearts, and injure our temper; if that selfish prudence which regards our own advantage, does not make us less compassionate and less charitable to our brethren; then may we be certified that

that we “ go from strength to strength ;
“ that we stand and feed in the strength of
“ the Lord.”

And here it will be easy to perceive, in the 4th place, that our practical principles are changed, and the inward constitution of our minds reformed. Our actions are acknowledged good or bad, according to the principles they proceed from ; and, therefore, if we are certain of our principles, we may easily judge of our behaviour. But so it happens that very different motives continually produce the same actions. Such a deed may appear a very charitable one, when the secret spring of it was vanity or shame, a particular or accidental liking, a desire to conceal one’s hard-heartedness, or a subtle view to future profit. Men are often sober and temperate out of avarice, or a fondness for some exercise or employment, and sometimes to enable themselves to sin

R 4

with

with greater ease and security in another way. This obscurity must often impose upon the world, and lead them into very partial opinions of men and things ; nay, it may now and then, to a certain degree, incline a person to pass a wrong judgment upon himself.

One that has but a superficial sense of religion, if it be supported by a happy natural temper, if his affairs are prosperous and easy, and the world smiles upon him, may perhaps imagine, from the moderation and regularity of his conduct, that he has a greater share of virtue than he can justly pretend to. But still, in the smoothest state of worldly happiness, there will always be crosses and anxieties sufficient to exercise our patience, and to give room, for every diligent observer of himself, to form an impartial judgment of his true character. Such a just and generous
part

part of our behaviour obtained the advantage and applause it appeared to deserve; yet it does not follow from thence that it was principally owing to those motives. But there is a surer trial of our sincerity, if we are disposed to use it. There are opportunities (and they frequently occur) of doing good in secret, without a witness or reward. How do we stand affected toward them? Do we seek for, embrace, and enjoy them? If we do, we cannot desire a more solid proof of our proficiency in this respect. We can forego, without reluctance, the vicious pleasures that would evidently ruin our fortunes, and disgrace our lives, and so far we certainly do well; but can we, as easily, reject the evil gratifications that solicit us in private, where all is safe and secure, where there appears no probability of a discovery, no prospect of detriment or shame? Misfortunes
also,

also, and disappointments, the necessary conditions of life, which are wisely permitted to exercise and confirm our piety, may also serve to make it manifest. Prosperity renders us indolent and inattentive, spreading a disguise over our minds and tempers; but in sorrow, distress, and affliction, the most secret sense of our souls is extorted from us; then the "heart is searched, and the reins are tried;" we appear to ourselves just as we are; we see our true principles, and make trial how far they will go. While the stream of our passions is calm and gentle, it may appear to be clear and undefiled; but when it is disturbed and agitated by adversity, we shall then discover if there be any filth and impurity concealed at the bottom.

A fifth mark of great proficiency is, if we perceive ourselves attentive to the least parts of duty; thinking nothing indifferent that

that may be called a fault, nothing inconsiderable that may improve our morals. He that hastens to be rich will not despise the least accession to his wealth. He that labours to be wise will not neglect the smallest increase of his knowledge; and shall they who aspire to be good undervalue the lowest improvement, the meanest exercise of virtue? When the grace of God is fruitful in us, and abounds, it will extend itself to every degree and circumstance of duty. And if the case be impartially considered, it will appear that those lesser opportunities of doing good, which occur continually in the course of life, are by no means so inconsiderable as at first they may seem; if upon no other account, yet because they occur continually. It is but seldom we are called upon to give great examples of integrity and self-denial, and the more important acts of duty; but every day,

day, every hour, in every company, we may find some occasion to exercise our candour and humanity; to prevent or reconcile the differences, to improve the pleasures, to overlook the resentments and little injuries of those we converse with; in short, to do something towards correcting their tempers and our own. It must be considered too, that our satisfaction or uneasiness does not always depend on the importance of the objects that raise them, but rather on the sense we conceive of them in our own minds. The most trivial matters may raise implacable passions in the proud and revengeful, which would have no effect on an humble mind, or, perhaps, might be applied to the purposes of peace and good-will.

That you may better comprehend how much the whole of our character may be affected by the minutest parts of conduct, consider

consider the situation of those who waste their days in sloth. Their life consists of a multitude of particulars, seemingly of no consequence: each action, considered separately, appears below praise or censure; but what does the sum of them amount to? To an uneasy state of contempt and wretchedness; where the passions are restless, but not employed; where the neglect of improvement, and the impossibility of being ever useful, is punished with a perpetual sense of it. But what is yet more important, the common instances of behaviour that relate to mutual convenience, and matters that are held indifferent, have the greatest influence in forming our practical habits, and giving that turn to our disposition which makes us to be what we are; vain, or humble; mild, or passionate; benevolent, or hard-hearted. If, in these things, we act at random,

without any regard to what is lovely and of good report, we shall hardly prevail with ourselves, in more considerable things, to bear a due regard to whatever is just, and pure, and honest; at least, we shall have the difficult task of moving against custom and inclination. But, suppose we were certain of performing what strict justice requires, and of avoiding all grosser sins, would this come up to the full extent of that law which commands us to fulfill all righteousness? Would this resemble that amiable character of mercy and perfection which our Saviour's example and doctrine recommends to us? There is nothing admirable in an edifice of common materials, framed only for strength and necessary use, where no convenience is consulted, no beauty or proportion observed. But let us, like a wise master builder, endeavour to adorn our work with all the
grace

grace and dignity of holiness, giving to every part of life its just proportion and ornament, that we may render our souls a temple fit for the divine glory to inhabit; “for, know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and the spirit of God dwelleth in you?”

The last mark of our improvement, and the most complete and satisfactory of all, is to love and delight in our duty. And this has a near connexion with the proof we mentioned last; so near, that either may be the cause or the consequence of the other; for, if we love our duty, we shall be diligent and watchful in the practice of it, attentive to the most minute and inconsiderable circumstances, thinking nothing beneath our notice; and, on the contrary, if we observe and attend to every particular of our duty, the reasonableness, the advantage, and the beauty of our conduct, will

will soon make us in love with it. But let it be remembered, that the love we are speaking of is very different from that indolent admiration of goodness, which no creature can be without, who is capable of reason and attention; and that it is very different too from the pleasure we take in practising such duties as coincide with our choice or interest; for the worst of men may be virtuous to such a degree. No: we have but a weak pretence to this divine love, till we feel it a vigorous and ruling principle within us, sufficient if not totally to extinguish, yet to obscure, overpower, and regulate the motions of all inferior appetites. Do we hesitate between right and wrong? Do we labour to make an artful composition between reputation and interest, or interest and duty? Are we content with subterfuges and evasions, that make things appear plausible, which our consciences

consciences cannot sincerely approve? Or do we listen cheerfully to the voice of Truth and Righteousness, enquiring honestly of our own hearts what it behoves us to do; and not considering, or not much valuing what we are to get or lose by it? We show our affection to things by the preference we give them; for “where our treasure is, there will our heart be also.” Nothing less than an implicit unreserved subjection of all desires, wishes, and pleasures, will come up to the terms of that precept, “to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul:” and that we may not doubt in what manner to signify and express our love, he himself, in another place, explains it: “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” Thrice happy and blessed are they who have this last and most illustrious argument of their growth in grace to rely

upon! whose pious constancy in well-doing, has at length engaged even sense and passion in the cause of religion; whose inclinations to meaner things are all blended and swallowed up in their inextinguishable thirst after holiness! They have nothing now to fear from temptations that cannot move them, from accidents and evils that cannot hurt them; knowing, by experience, that “the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever;” rejoicing in their continual approach towards the blessedness and security of that celestial state of which they enjoy some foretaste here below.

But, in the highest exaltation of spiritual endowments that our imperfect state is susceptible of, it will often be expedient, even for saints themselves, to suspend a while the contemplation of their own happiness,

piners, by turning their observation on human affairs, that they may examine what effect their goodness produces in society, what influence their behaviour has upon mankind. This will either give a farther confirmation to their faith, by making it appear that their piety has obtained all its ends; or it will point out to them by what error or inadvertency any part of their conduct, which was honestly intended, missed of its aim. For, after all, the great business of religion is to make men live together in love and happiness, and to do as much good to the world as it will bear; and, where it fails of this purpose, it is either very imperfect, or very imprudently managed, or very unfortunate. We therefore find, in Scripture, that holy Job urges as the most eminent proof of his integrity, the blessings it brought upon his neighbours, and

the grateful sense they retained of them, and the veneration they bore to his virtue.

“ When the ear heard me, then it blessed
“ me; and when the eye saw me, it gave
“ witness to me. Because I delivered the
“ poor that cried, and the fatherless, and
“ him that had none to help him. The
“ blessing of him that was ready to perish
“ came upon me; and I caused the wi-
“ dow’s heart to sing for joy. Unto me
“ men gave ear, and waited and kept
“ silence at my counsel. After my words
“ they spake not again, and my speech
“ dropped upon them.”

Let us examine our lives with strictness, and see if we can find this external testimony of a good conscience before God and men. Do we reap the genuine fruits of our own righteousness and charity, in the gratitude and good-will of those who receive the benefit of them? Are our pa-
rents,

rents, our friends, our neighbours, and servants, contented and pleased with the relation we bear to them? Do our inferiors acknowledge our equity and mildness, and own that the blessings of Providence are justly lodged in those hands that employ them so well? Is our piety never offensive nor burthensome to our brethren? It certainly will be so, if we openly value it, or upbraid others with the want of it. Is there no partiality nor indiscretion that takes off from the merit of our good deeds, and makes men less inclined to approve them? Do those whom we live with acknowledge that religion has mended our tempers, that our conversation is more candid and considerate, our behaviour more friendly and benevolent? Is our moderation and equity known unto all men? Do even the wicked give testimony to our integrity, and praise that conduct which

they cannot resolve to imitate? We may enquire, with just reason, whether these effects accompany our actions, for these are no other than the natural effects of righteousness. "The fruit of the Spirit is "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance;" the very things that invite and provoke men to love us, that raise affection and esteem in all hearts that are not incapable of them. For there is nothing so naturally approved by the mind of man, nothing so amiable, so worthy, so truly popular, as goodness. Yet, we readily own, that the most circumspect piety may sometimes appear ridiculous or detestable; that the most upright intentions may be misrepresented and misunderstood; that prejudice and ill-will may make men loathe their truest friends and benefactors. But these misrepresentations arise but seldom,
are

are never general, nor continue long; and whatever impositions the world may be liable to, an honest man will easily judge whether any neglect or imprudence of his own, or the mistakes and malice of others, have given occasion to them. Hence, indeed, we have a demonstration, that the opinions and esteem of men are not a certain and unerring rule, sufficient for the guidance of our lives; and yet they may usefully assist us to judge of our conduct, and, in some instances, to correct it.

SEK

S E R M O N X I.

ROM. xiv. 17.

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

THE greatest part of Christians in the Apostles days having been educated originally in the Jewish religion, and but newly converted from it, it is not to be wondered at, that, whilst some of them rightly understood the nature and excellency of the Gospel, others of them, who were of weaker judgments and less clear under-

understandings, retained, for a long time after their conversion, many of their ancient scruples and prejudices concerning distinctions of days, and differences of meats, which they had been taught to look upon, not according to the true intention of the law, as being typically and figuratively under the then present dispensation, but as being really and intrinsically, morally and perpetually, clean and unclean. "One man" (says St. Paul) "believeth that he may eat all things; another, who is weak, eateth herbs. One man esteemeth one day above another; another esteemeth every day alike." The method the Apostle takes in this case to prevent any inconveniences arising in the church, from this diversity of men's apprehensions concerning indifferent things, is by persuading them that one of the great ends and designs of true religion is, the promoting

promoting among men universal peace and good-will towards each other; "Let us," says he, "follow after the things that make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another;" and he concludes that the only way to obtain this most desirable end, is to forbear censuring each other upon account of things not in their own nature vicious and immoral: "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not, judge him that eateth. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. Let us not therefore judge one another; but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block, or occasion to fall in his brother's way." After this he adds, in the words
of

of the text, as an argument or reason for their thus bearing with one another, drawn from the nature and essence of true religion, “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” In the following Discourse upon these words, I shall first explain distinctly the several expressions made use of in the text, and then I shall proceed to draw some useful observations and inferences therefrom.

First. By the kingdom of God is signified, God’s supreme dominion over the universe; the whole course of nature in heaven and earth, being merely the effects of his will and pleasure, for all things serve him. But because the principal and most valuable part of government consists in the subjection, and willing obedience of rational and moral agents, hence, in Scripture, the kingdom of God generally signifies

signifies that state or establishment of true religion or righteousness in the world; which would have been fixed or settled in the state of innocence; but which, by sin and disobedience, was removed from among men; and which, by repentance and amendment, is in some degree restored upon earth, and will be perfectly and for ever established in heaven. And because the principal means by which this recovery of sinful creatures is accomplished, is the Gospel of Christ; therefore the state of the Gospel, the spreading of the profession of true religion, and, above all, the real efficacy and influence of it upon the minds of men, are by our Saviour and his Apostles frequently stiled the kingdom of God. When our Lord bids his disciples to "seek in the first place the kingdom of God," he explains his meaning by adding in the next words, "and his righteousness;"

and

and tells them that “ whosoever shall not
“ receive the kingdom of God as a little
“ child”—whosoever shall not receive the
doctrine of the Gospel with humility and
sincerity, with simplicity and probity of
mind— “ he shall not enter therein ;” *i. e.*
he shall not be acknowledged as a disciple
of Christ. And they who do receive it for a
time, but continue not to live worthy of
the religion they profess, this kingdom of
God, he threatens, shall be taken from
them, and given to a nation bringing forth
the fruits thereof. And if it be not taken
from them, yet, at the end, “ the Son of
“ man,” says he, “ shall send forth his angels,
“ and they shall gather out of his kingdom
“ (out from among the professors of his
“ religion) all that offend, and them which
“ do iniquity, and shall cast them into a
“ furnace of fire : there shall be weeping
“ and gnashing of teeth.” The words “ meat
“ and

“and drink” are an allusion to that distinction of meats of clean and unclean, and other such like external observances, on which the Jews laid so great a stress in their religion. The first tabernacle, says the Apostle, stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances imposed on them unto the time of their reformation. And because they were imposed only until the time of their reformation, therefore when the Gospel of Christ was established, those things were no longer to take place. “Let no man
“judge you in meat or drink, or in respect
“of a holiday, or of the new moon, or of
“the sabbath days, which are a shadow of
“things to come, but the body is of Christ.
“Why then are ye subject to ordinances
“(which are all to perish with the using)
“after the commandments and doctrines of
“men.” Things of this nature, even during
the

the Jewish dispensation, were by all reasonable persons understood to be in their own nature indifferent, however commanded for a time upon particular reasons. They were not really perfective of them which did the service, any otherwise than as types having their signification verified by moral purity and holiness. “It is a good thing (saith St. Paul) that the heart be established with grace, not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.”

And if even to the Jews themselves the case was such, much more were those Christians to blame, whom St. Paul writes to in this Epistle to the Romans, and in his first to the Corinthians, who professing a religion not appointed for the separating of one particular nation, but in which all nations were to agree, yet desired to lay too great a stress upon such particular observances,

observancies, with regard to things in their own nature indifferent; as could have no other tendency than to promote divisions among Christians, and uncharitableness in their judging others; which are the great hindrances of that glory of God, that consists in the universal establishment of peace and righteousness among men. Against those persons, therefore, he directs himself when he so earnestly exhorts, “Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” And, in another place, “The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power; not in mere forms of godliness, but in the effectual practice of true virtue.” And in the words of the text, “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”

The terms, righteousness, and peace,

VOL. I.

T

and

and joy in the Holy Ghost, are here put by way of eminence as parts for the whole, as being the principal virtues in which true religion consists, or (as our Saviour speaks) the weightier matters of the law. The word righteousness comprehends the practice of those moral and eternal virtues, justice, equity, truth, fidelity, holiness, purity, and the like; the opposites whereof are, all injustice and iniquity to others, and all excesses and intemperances in which men indulge themselves.

The term peace, signifies that good temper, that charitable spirit and kind disposition of mind, by which those, who, with regard to things in their own nature indifferent, have not exactly the same sentiments; yet, through mutual forbearance and love towards each other, preserve, nevertheless, the bands of Christian unity and concord. Lastly, the words
joy

joy in the Holy Ghost, signify that delight, and taking pleasure in doing good, which is the highest perfection of Christian virtue; and that satisfaction even in suffering at any time (if the will of God be so) for righteousness sake, which is the highest evidence of Christian sincerity: which affection of mind, because it is (at least in remarkable cases) worked into men by the assistance and influence of the Divine Spirit, is therefore called in the text "joy in the Holy Ghost;" while, at the same time, in other places, it is mentioned under the most large and unlimited expressions of "rejoicing evermore," "rejoicing in hope," "rejoicing in the Lord," and, in general, "doing all things with gladness" and singleness of heart." Nor is there any inconsistency in thus representing one and the same Christian virtue as being both a good disposition in the mind itself of the

man who possesses it, and yet also an influence of the Spirit of God. For as, in true philosophy, all natural actions, when pursued with the most sagacious exactness of enquiry through all their series of second causes, appear at last to the eye of the most exquisite philosopher, as they do at first to the pious judgment of the meanest Christian, to be derived originally from God ; so, in spiritual actions, those very virtues, which, essentially to their being virtues at all, must be the voluntary operations of a man's own mind, may yet very consistently have, at the same time, the like sort of dependence upon the influences of the Divine Spirit, as all our natural actions have upon that concurrence of God, from which our wills themselves, and all the faculties of our nature, continually and every moment derive that power of acting. / And this observation
will

will very clearly account for all those passages of Scripture, wherein the virtues of men, and the gifts and graces of the spirit of God, are promiscuously taken for each other. "The fruits of the spirit," in St. Paul's catalogue, "are individually the same as moral virtues;" and Barnabas, being "a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost," are joined together as expressions of the same meaning. And what our Saviour, in St. Luke, says of our Heavenly Father's "giving his holy Spirit," is in St. Matthew, recording the very same words, understood of his "giving good things to them that ask him." Secondly, Having distinctly, and at large, explained all the several expressions in the text: "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;" the observations I would draw from the Apostle's

assertion are briefly as follows : First, That the great end of true religion is the establishing among men the practice of moral goodness and righteousness. God is himself essentially a Being of infinite purity and holiness ; and his future kingdom in heaven is of such a nature, that there shall in no wise “ enter into it any “ thing that defileth, neither whatsoever “ worketh abomination, or maketh a lie.” Consequently, those virtues which are essential to the enjoyment of the happiness of heaven hereafter, cannot but be the principal constituents of the kingdom of God here. The second observation I would draw, is, that though the great and principal end of true religion is the promoting and establishing the practice of moral virtue and righteousness, yet the externals also of religion, matters of order and decency, and particular appointment,
are

are nevertheless not to be neglected. The distinction of meats and drinks alluded to in the text, though they are not the kingdom of God, nor of the essence of religion, yet, under the Jewish dispensation, they were expressly and immediately of divine appointment. And so long as they were appointed, and for the ends to which they were appointed, and in subordination to those ends, they were of necessity to be observed. "The weightier matters of the law ought," as our Saviour expresses it with the most perfect accuracy, they "ought to be done, and the others not to be left undone." And in proportion now, and at all times under the Christian dispensation, matters of positive appointment, of decency and external form, so far as they are helps and means of religion, ought not in any wise to be left undone.

The third observation is, that that form

T 4

is

is most perfect which has the fewest positive rites, and lays the least stress upon them, and in which those rites which are appointed, have the most direct and immediate tendency to promote real virtue and holiness. This is evident in the nature of things; for, in all cases whatsoever the end is always best, and more certainly attained, where the means made use of are fewest in number, and have no other stress laid on them, than just as they promote the end they were designed for.

The inferences from what has been said shall be very short, and such as obviously follow from the foregoing observations. First, From hence appears the peculiar excellency and advantage of the Christian religion: that it is not burthened, as the Jewish was, with a multitude of outward rites and ceremonies; with perpetual washings, purifications, sacrifices, and
other

other typical observations, which, as the Apostle expresses it, “neither we nor our fathers were able to bear;” but requires of us, in order to eternal salvation, only faith in God, and in Jesus Christ; repentance from dead works, and obedience to the laws of Christ in the Gospel, in expectation of the resurrection to eternal judgment.

Hence appears also the great wisdom and usefulness of those few, even external rites in the Christian institution; the preaching of the word, and the administration of the sacraments; these being such means as have a direct natural tendency to promote the ends of real virtue and holiness. For by the preaching of the word, men are instructed in the knowledge of their duty, and continually exhorted to perform it. By baptism, they are admitted into a solemn obligation to obey it:
and

and by the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, they continually renew that obligation. Yet excellent as these means are, both in their natural aptness to the ends designed, and, moreover, as being expressly and positively commanded by Christ himself; yet that they are still but means subordinate to, and useful only as they promote, the practice of real godliness, righteousness, and charity, is evident from hence; that the virtues which these institutions were intended to promote, are absolutely, essentially, indispensably, and, without any excepted case, necessary to salvation, there being no expedient by which an unrighteous person, continuing such, can possibly enter the kingdom of heaven: the Gospel itself unto such a person, instead of being "a favour of life unto life, becomes "a favour of death unto death." Baptism being merely the washing away the filth
of

of the flesh, and not the answer of a good conscience towards God, is of no benefit to him, and the receiving the Lord's Supper does but increase his condemnation. But now, on the other side, in matters of positive institution, though by our Lord himself declared generally necessary to salvation, yet in particular circumstances there are manifestly some excepted cases. Infants dying suddenly, before baptism, no reasonable person can believe shall perish, for what can in no sense be esteemed their fault. The penitent upon the cross, though he could not be baptized, yet received from our Lord's own mouth a promise of salvation. And in the primitive ages, when many converts, before they could be baptized, were carried immediately to martyrdom, no one doubted but their dying literally with, and for Christ, was more than equivalent to being
figu-

figuratively buried with him, by baptism into death.

Let us remember, then, that even in the sacraments and divine institutions, the intention of our great lawgiver is not to exact from us any proofs of superficial or useless obedience, but to present us with the means of becoming better men. All the doctrines of belief, and all the articles of our faith, are to promote the same purpose. It is of no use or service simply to believe that "God was made manifest in "the flesh;" for this is a faith which we share in common with the devils, for they also believe and tremble; but let our faith be like the faith of angels, which only prompts them more effectually to perform the will of their Maker.

LET-

S E R M O N X I I .

MATT. v. 3.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is
the kingdom of Heaven.*

THE beatitudes, or declarations of blessedness, with which our Saviour begins his sermon on the mount, though they seem, each of them, to be the recommendation of some singular virtue, and to contain, each of them singly, a promise that such a particular virtue shall have its distinct, proper, and peculiar reward; yet this is not to be so understood as if any of the virtues here specified were to be taken separately, exclusive of other virtues;

tues; or as if any of the rewards here distinctly mentioned, were to be looked upon as conferred separately, and divided from the other constituents of the happiness of Heaven: but, by a very usual manner of speaking, wherein a part is figuratively put for the whole; as in other places of scripture, faith, or hope, or charity, or repentance, or the love or fear of God, do frequently stand for the whole duty of a Christian; and the single particulars of seeing God, or being with God, or of living for ever, are intended to include, in general, all the blessings and happiness, all the glories and enjoyments, of the heavenly state: so here also our Saviour, in each beatitude, must be understood, in general, to annex the promise of the happiness of Heaven to the whole practice of our Christian duty. Of these beatitudes, the first is what will be the subject

subject of our present meditation; “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.” I shall first endeavour to explain distinctly the meaning of the expression, being poor in spirit, and then draw some observations from the consideration of the nature of the virtue here spoken of, and of the rewards here declared to be annexed to it.

In order to explain distinctly the meaning of this phrase, being poor in spirit, it is to be observed, that those two different manners of expression which we now call literal and figurative, were, in the Jewish language, frequently denoted by the words flesh and spirit. “The flesh,” says our Saviour, “profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” His meaning is, he intended not to be understood literally but figuratively. To be, therefore, or do any thing

thing, in spirit, signifies being or doing that thing figuratively, in the spiritual or moral, in the religious or abstract sense; in opposition to the gross or literal meaning in which the same words may sometimes be understood. Thus, when the angel, in the Revelation, carried away St. John, in the spirit, into the wilderness, the meaning is, he was not carried thither really and literally, but only in a visionary representation. By the like figure of speech, St. Paul, when he was personally absent, yet, because his name, his commission, and authority was to be made use of as if he himself had been there—"I, "therefore," says he, "verily am absent "in body, but present in spirit:" and again, "though I am absent in the flesh, "yet am I with you in spirit, joying "with you, and beholding your order." And, in a still more sublime use of the afflictions

same metaphor, while he was yet at full liberty, and had no violence offered him, yet prophetically seeing that bonds and afflictions were coming upon him: “ Be-
“ hold,” says he, “ I go bound in the
“ spirit unto Jerusalem.” Answerable, therefore, to this figurative manner of expression in so many other places, the phrase in the text, “ poor in spirit,” in contradistinction to literal poverty of estate, signifies a temper of mind disengaged from, and sitting loose to the covetous and ambitious desires of the present world; that moderate and good temper or disposition which causes those who have riches not to set their hearts upon them, not to abuse them, not to trust in them, but to employ them virtuously to the glory of God, and to be at all times willing rather to part with them than betray the interest of truth and virtue; and which, for the same rea-

son, causes those who have no riches to be contented, and not murmuring nor unthankful towards God, but willing rather to continue always in a mean and low estate, than to gain riches by unrighteous and unlawful methods. This is being "poor in spirit." This is what the Prophet Isaiah describes: "To this man will I look, saith the Lord, even to him that is poor; to him that is of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." This is the temper of those whom St. James calls "the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom." According to this account of the virtue of being poor in spirit, Moses was an eminent instance, who refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, chusing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season: and the contrary spirit is that
which

which our Saviour speaks of; " So is he
" that layeth up treasure for himself, and
" is not rich towards God."

It remains, in the second place, that I proceed to draw some observations from the consideration of the nature of the virtue here spoken of, and of the reward here declared to be annexed to it. " Blessed
" are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the
" kingdom of Heaven." And first, from what has been said, it appears that persons of all ranks and conditions whatsoever are equally concerned in the admonition included in the declaration here made by our Lord. Poor and rich, the meanest and the greatest, are equally capable of, and equally obliged to be poor in spirit. A person of the largest and most plentiful possessions, if he has obtained them by lawful and honourable methods; if they make him not insolent and oppressive to

his neighbours; if he uses them with sobriety, moderation, and temperance; if he be willing to relieve the necessities of those that want, and be rich in good works as well as possessions; if, being rich in this world, he be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; if he does good, and is ready to communicate, “laying up in store for himself a good foundation for the time to come, that he may lay hold on eternal life:” in a word, if he prefers the commandments of God before the increase of his worldly interest, and is willing, upon any occasion, to run the hazard of losing what he possesses, rather than depart from the ways of truth and virtue—this man, though he possessed the wealth of the Indies, and exceeded even Solomon in all his grandeur, yet still he would be included

cluded in the description given by our Saviour in the text, and would be entitled to the blessedness of being poor in spirit. On the other side, one who is literally poor, if he be unthankful and complaining against God; if his poverty be brought upon himself by debauchery or idleness; if he be vicious as far as his circumstances enable him, and would stick at no unrighteous practices to advance a fortune: such a one, though he be in the lowest poverty of estate, yet can in no degree come under the denomination of being poor in spirit. It is evident, therefore, that these words of our Lord do not relate to men's external circumstances or condition in the world, but to the temper and disposition of their minds; and, consequently, that the advice included in this beatitude, or declaration of blessedness, equally concerns persons of all ranks and

estates whatsoever. The poor, by contentment, patience, and resignation to the will of God, and by the exercise of such other virtues as are more peculiarly proper to a mean and low estate: and the rich, by preferring, at all times, the commands of God before either the increase or the preservation of their wealth, are equally capable of being, and equally obliged to be, poor in spirit. Nevertheless, though the virtue here recommended is undoubtedly the common duty of both, yet, since the poor are, in this particular, under fewer temptations, and can withdraw their affections from such an adherence to the world as is the chief impediment of a Christian life, with much less difficulty than the rich can do; and since, upon this account, our Lord and his Apostles do very frequently pronounce, absolutely and in general, woe to the rich, and blessedness

fedness to the poor, in such large and unlimited expressions as may easily be mistaken, unless interpreted according to the analogy of the more distinct manners of speaking used in other places. Therefore,

Secondly, I observe, that there is contained in the text a particular ground of comfort and support to those who are poor and destitute, and under mean circumstances in the world, and particular matter of caution to those who abound in riches and power, and the good things of this present life. The duty here recommended by our Lord, of being poor in spirit is, as I have already observed, equally obligatory to persons of all ranks and conditions whatsoever; and the promise annexed is to all, in whatever station they may be in the world, who shall attain that good temper and disposition of mind. But now this

excellent temper, this virtue of being disengaged from the covetous desires of the world, is what the poor are naturally led to by their very circumstances; being under the advantage of escaping many temptations to which others are continually subject, and being perpetually called upon, by the afflictions of this life, to turn their thoughts to the expectation of a better. It ought, therefore, to be matter of just comfort and support, nay, even of thankfulness too, under many kinds of temporal wants and afflictions, to consider how great an advantage such circumstances give men of obtaining this virtue.

For the same reason, on the other side, to those who abound in riches and power, and the good things of this present life, the text plainly suggests particular matter of caution in annexing the heavenly reward to that temper and disposition of mind which

which they, in particular, are furrounded with so many temptations to depart from, that our Saviour sometimes pronounces, in words seemingly absolute, “ Woe unto “ you that are rich, for ye have received “ your consolation.” It is evident, his meaning cannot be to represent riches as a crime ; for he, elsewhere, explains to his disciples, that he means not to blame those who have, but those who, to the neglect of God and virtue, trust in riches. His design clearly was, to admonish and put us in mind how dangerous a state great prosperity generally is ; how full of temptation ; how ready to puff men up ; how apt to make them covetous, insolent, and ambitious ; and to destroy in them that meek, that equitable, that moderate disposition of mind which, in the text, is stiled being “ poor in spirit.” St. Paul gives us a remarkable instance of an ill effect,

effect, in this kind, even of a little prosperity ; when the Corinthians, falling into divisions among themselves, began to be puffed up one against another: “ Now,” says he, “ ye are full ; now ye are rich ; “ ye have reigned as kings without us.” And our Saviour, in his admonition to the churches of Laodicea, hints at a like case: “ Thou sayest, I am rich and increased “ with goods, and have need of nothing ; “ and knowest not that thou art wretched “ and poor, and blind, and naked.”

A third observation which may be made upon the words of the text, is, that from the reason our Saviour here gives why he pronounces the poor in spirit to be blessed ; from this reason, I say, here annexed by our Saviour, it evidently appears, that however excellent virtue may be in itself, and truly desirable, even for its own sake ; yet neither are the highest improvements in religion

religion any way inconsistent with having respect to the recompence of reward; nor is the practice of virtue, as some have most absurdly argued with a vain affectation, at all mercenary, when founded upon a view to the happiness of heaven. Mercenaryness supposes always that something wrong is done for the sake of such lucre as a virtuous man can never purchase upon such terms. But the happiness of Heaven consists in, and is essentially conjoined with, the perfection of virtue; and the expectation and view of this reward, is itself an immediate act of the virtue of depending upon God. Were temporal prosperity the certain and constant, and at all times, the immediate reward of virtue, it might indeed be alledged, not that the practice thereof was mercenary, because that always supposes the doing of something in itself blameworthy; but it might be alledged,
in

in diminution of the excellence of it, as we find it was in the case of Job, in the time of his prosperity : “ Does Job serve “ God for nought ? ” But, as the practice of virtue is, in reality, far from being secure of any temporal recompence, and the reward it principally relies upon is spiritual and heavenly, the expectation of such a reward, far from being any diminution, is itself a proper act of virtue and and dependance upon God. In the ancient world, the virtue of the best and bravest men, under the light of nature and reason, consisted in their trusting in God : in their trusting, without any express revealed promise that the Judge of the whole earth would finally do what is right, and would not suffer virtue to perish equally with vice. Under the Old Testament, Moses being eminently what our Saviour calls poor in spirit, preferred the poverty and affliction
of

of the People of God before the riches and honours of Pharaoh's court; and it is recorded of him, not in a way of diminishing but extolling his virtue, that he esteemed this reproach to be greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompence of reward. Under the New Testament, God has in a more exprefs manner declared himself to be, in the future and eternal state, a rewarder of those that diligently seek him; not thereby to diminish but increase that virtue, the practice of which is rationally and consistently supported by so divine and glorious an expectation. Accordingly, the Apostle St. Paul declares concerning himself, that he "pressed towards the mark for the prize
"of the high calling of God in Christ
"Jesus." And he perpetually exhorts all other Christians "so to run that they may
"obtain an incorruptible crown; so to
"behave

“ behave themselves as they who are continually looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; laying hold upon the hope set before them; even the hope which is laid up for them in Heaven; looking not at the things which are temporal, but at the things which are eternal?” and considering that their light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

Nay, which is more remarkable than all these, concerning our Lord's own practice, the Scripture declares, that, “ for the joy which was set before him, he endured the cross, despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God.” To imagine, therefore, as some enthusiasts have done, that the profession of virtue wholly excludes self-love and all regards to any recom-

recompence of reward, is taking upon themselves to reproach the greatest and most eminently virtuous men that have lived in all nations and in all ages ; it is reproaching the Apostles of our Lord ; it is reproaching our Saviour in his own practice ; it is reproaching God himself, and the nature of things which he has made ; who has prepared for, and expressly promised to, them that love and obey him, such good things as pass man's understanding, “ which eye hath not seen, nor “ ear heard, neither hath it entered into the “ heart of man to conceive.” Through the expectation of which spiritual and eternal happiness, whoever is prevailed upon to live virtuously, has a right to apply to himself on account of religion in general, what our Saviour, in the text, says in particular of those who are poor in spirit ; “ Blessed are they, for theirs is the King-
“ dom of Heaven.”

S E R-

S E R M O N XIII.

MATT. vi. 31, 32.

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek: for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

THE duty of contentment and resignation to the will of God, is a duty whose obligation is evident, even from the law of nature. For, since we at first received our being from God, and owe our preservation to him every moment, and every

thing we enjoy is his free gift, it is plain that all thanks are due to him for whatever good we receive; and no man has any just reason to repine against Providence for the want of such good things as he has no right to demand. As to the calamities and troubles incident to human life, with regard to these also, sinful creatures have no just cause of murmuring: "for wherefore doth a living man complain; a man for the punishment of his sins." Under the revelation of the gospel, the grounds and motives of contentment are become yet much stronger, since the concerns of this present world, short and uncertain, and transitory in themselves, appear still more transitory, when compared with that life and immortality which is now brought to light; and the afflictions of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be

be revealed hereafter. Proportionable to the real value of things ought to be men's care and concern about them: and therefore, with the greatest reason, our Saviour, in exhorting his disciples to take care of their eternal interest, bids them, comparatively speaking, to "take no thought
 "what they should eat, or what they
 "should drink, or wherewithal they
 "should be clothed; for after all these
 "things do the Gentiles seek; for your
 "heavenly Father knoweth that ye have
 "need of these things." Literally understood, the precept, to the greatest part of Christians, is manifestly impracticable; for the necessities of life must needs be taken care of; and, without the support of the present life, there can be no room for the practice of those virtues by which we are prepared for that which is to come. There must, therefore, be some distinc-

tions made in our understanding this and the like precepts; for want of attending to which many are apt to say, “this is a hard saying, who can bear it?” And yet, in reality, the distinctions upon which the right understanding of this precept depends, are as plain and obvious in the nature of the thing, and in the construction and connexion of the words themselves, as other the most usual figures and comparative ways of expression in common speech, which no man ever mistakes.

To set this matter, therefore, in a clear and distinct light, I observe, first, that there was a particular time, and there were particular persons, when and to whom, and when and to whom only, this precept was given in its literal and strict sense. Our Saviour sent forth his Apostles to preach the gospel from city to city, in such a manner as was altogether inconsistent with
their

their attending to any worldly affairs: accordingly, he invested them with miraculous powers, and promised to afford them a miraculous support. And suitable to the circumstances of such a mission were the precepts he gave them to be observed in it. “Freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold nor silver, nor brags in your purses; nor scrip for your journey; neither two coats; neither shoes, nor yet staves; for the workman is worthy of his meat.” At another time, and in other circumstances, his directions to them were very different. “Now he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip; and he that hath no sword let him sell his garment and buy one.” In like manner, the words of the text, considered as spoken to the Apostles, during their preaching from one city to another, may well be understood

literally: "Take no thought what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, or where-withal ye shall be clothed. Take no thought," no not so much as "for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." But, when the words are considered as a general direction to all Christians, at all times, and in all circumstances, then it is manifest they must be understood as a caution against such worldly cares as are inconsistent with our duty; in like manner, as to the Apostles, they were, at that particular time, a prohibition of all worldly cares, as being inconsistent with their duty. The professors of Christ's religion must, at no times, and in no circumstances, be so solicitous; they must, in no case be so anxious about the affairs of the present life as to neglect the greater and more important concerns of that which is to come. And
this

this sense of the words is justified by the argument our Saviour makes use of some verses before. "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other: ye cannot serve God and mammon: therefore I say to you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat and what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body what ye shall put on;" *i. e.* do not so take thought about these things as to become servants of Mammon, and forget your duty toward your heavenly Master. St. John, in his first Epistle, gives a like exhortation. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world: if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." And the words of our Saviour, ver. 34. of this chapter, "Take no thought for the morrow;" as they might

well be applied to the Apostles in the literal sense, during the time of their mission; so, with regard to Christians in all ages (the word *Morrow* signifying, figuratively, the indefinite, uncertain, future time of man's life), they may very reasonably, according to the fore-mentioned argument drawn by our Lord from the impossibility of serving both God and Mammon; they may, very reasonably, I say, be understood only as a prohibition of that care of the world which he himself elsewhere describes as choaking the word, so that it becometh unfruitful: it being, indeed, very natural for worldly and ambitious minds continually to enlarge their prospect of the morrow, and to extend their hopes and designs from one uncertain indeterminate time to another, till death unexpectedly blasts all their thoughts at once, and surprises them, “unfruitful of any
“works

“works of righteousness:” which folly is, in a very moving manner, reprov'd by our Saviour, in the parable of the rich man who was blessing himself in the vain thoughts of his stores laid up for many years, that very night when his soul was required from him.

Secondly, I observe that the words of the text, when considered as a general command to all Christians, are very reasonably to be understood in a greater latitude of signification; because, if we attend to the connexion of the whole sentence in these and the following verses, we shall find the expression not absolute, but comparative. “Take no thought (says our Lord) what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; but seek ye first” or principally (in St. Luke it is—“seek ye rather) the kingdom of God.” Now, according to the nature of the Jewish language, two sentences joined in this manner

manner by way of opposition, are in sense the same only as if it had been said in one: be more careful to attain the kingdom of God than the conveniences of this present life. There are in Scripture many remarkable expressions of this kind. In the Old Testament, "Jacob have I loved," says God, "and Esau have I hated." The propositions are not to be understood separately, but to be taken together as one; I have loved Jacob more than Esau: for God did not intend to express hatred toward Esau, but only to love Jacob comparatively with a greater love. Again, in Jeremiah, "I spake not unto your fathers
"nor commanded them, in the day that I
"brought them out of the land of Egypt,
"concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices;
"but this thing I commanded them,
"saying, obey my voice." The two parts of this sentence of the Prophet are not to
be

be understood separately, as if he affirmed that God did not require burnt-offerings at all (for it is certain he did command them in most express words in the law), but the whole is to be understood together, that God did not insist upon burnt-offerings so much as upon obedience to the commands of the moral law. There is a like expression in Hosea, "I desired mercy and not sacrifice." The meaning is not that God did not require sacrifice; but that he desired "mercy rather than sacrifice, and (as it follows in the very next words) the knowledge of the Lord more than burnt-offerings." In the New Testament, the same manner of expression, agreeable to the nature of the Jewish language, is also frequently used; and it is necessary to be taken notice of, in order to the true understanding of several passages: "I pray not for the world," says
our

our Saviour, "but for them thou hast given me." His meaning is, not that he did not at all desire the conversion and salvation of the whole world; but that his principal and particular regard, in the petitions he was at that time putting up, was towards those who at present actually believed on his name. Again, in his discourse with the woman of Canaan, "I am not sent," says he, "but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" for, that he was also, in process of time, "to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as to be the glory of his people Israel," the writings of the Prophets expressly enough declared; and our Saviour himself, in this very place sufficiently intimates, when immediately after that seeming refusal, yet he effectually granted this stranger's request by healing the infirmity of her daughter. And, in his instructions to

to his disciples, he speaks with less obscurity: "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel:" which, afterwards was still more clearly expressed, Acts xiii. it was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to the Jews, but afterwards to the Gentiles.

In St. Paul's Epistles there are many instances of the like manner of speaking. "Adam was not deceived," says he, "but the woman, being deceived, was in the transgression." His meaning is not to say that Adam was not deceived at all; but, that the woman being first deceived, began the transgression. In another place, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient." He never intended to affirm that all actions were lawful, but that of those actions which were confessedly lawful, yet it did not follow

follow that they were all expedient. In the same Epistle, "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." He does not mean absolutely that he was not to baptize at all; but that his proper and peculiar office was not so much to baptize men with his own hands, as to preach the gospel to them, in order to their conversion. And thus, therefore, in the words of the text, if the connexion of the whole be considered, and the two parts of the sentence united in one, "Take no thought, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink; but seek ye first the kingdom of God;" the sense, it is very clear, will be comparative, and amount only to this—Be not so solicitous for the things of this present life as to neglect the more important concerns of that which is to come; but let your principal and chief care be to secure your eternal interest;

terest; and the blessing of Providence upon your ordinary industry, will provide you such a proportion of temporal accommodations, as he shall see best and most expedient for you. In some particular cases, God has given extraordinary examples of this kind; as, in the instance of Solomon, God said unto him, "Because thou hast not asked for thyself
"riches, nor the life of thine enemies,
"but understanding to discern judgment; behold I have given thee a wise
"and understanding heart, and I have
"also given thee that which thou didst
"not ask, both riches and honour." Our Saviour does not promise any thing of this nature to his disciples, because "his kingdom is not of this world." But a competency of temporal blessings, he encourages them to expect, shall be added to them; always excepting the case of persecution,

cution, to which is annexed a promise of peculiar rewards.

Thirdly, I observe farther, that the precept in the text, when considered as a general command to all Christians, appears plainly intended to be understood with some latitude, from the reasons assigned by our Lord, in the very words themselves: "Take no thought what ye shall eat, or
" what ye shall drink, for after all these
" things do the Gentiles seek." The thing, therefore, here prohibited by our Lord to his disciples, is such a solicitude after the affairs of this world as the Gentiles exercise who know not God; who have neither a right sense of the providence of God disposing of all things temporal here on earth: nor that certain expectation which God has given us of an eternal kingdom hereafter in the heavens. These men (except a few noble spirits
among

among them, of which the world was not worthy) generally lived according to that Epicurean maxim, "Let us eat and drink, "for to-morrow we die:" placing their happiness in such enjoyments as they possessed in common with the beasts that perish; which gratifications of sense our Saviour commanded his disciples to have no regard for, comparatively with their care for the concerns of eternity.

4thly, That the words of the text, when applied to Christians in general, are not to be understood in the strict and literal sense, but in that comparative manner I have now explained, appears farther, from the additional reason subjoined by our Saviour in the last clause: "For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things." Our heavenly Father knowing that we have need of these things, is not a reason against our taking thought

for them in that method of labour and honest industry, by which himself, who knows that we have need of them, has appointed them to be obtained; but it is a reason only against such solicitude about them as implies either a distrusting of Providence, or the not having a right sense of it, or not making a just acknowledgment of it in all things. The manner of our Saviour's arguing in this particular, is exactly parallel to the directions we find him giving in this chapter concerning prayer. "Ye," says he, "when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the Heathen do, for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking: be not ye therefore like unto them, for your Father knoweth what things you have need of before you ask him." Yet, in the very next words, he instructs them how they shall pray for those very things,
their

their want of which, he had just told them, God perfectly knew before-hand. As, therefore, our Saviour, in his instructions about prayer, by telling his disciples that their heavenly Father knows what things they have need of before they ask him, does not encourage them to forbear praying at all, but directs them to pray in such a manner as is most proper to express their just acknowledgment of him, and entire dependance upon him, whom they know to be before-hand perfectly acquainted with all their wants: so, in the text likewise, by telling us that our Father knows we have need of all these things, it is plain he does not mean to encourage us (in general and ordinary cases) to neglect the usual and natural means of providing for our subsistence; but only, as was before observed, forbids such a solicitude about worldly affairs, as implies a distrust

of God's providence. A disciple of Christ must have it constantly and habitually impressed upon his mind, that it is our heavenly Father who continually supplies us with all necessaries for the preservation of that being which he at first gave us: that it is he who causes his sun to rise, and sends us rain and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness: that, it is he, who, in the Psalmist's expression, "maketh the grass to grow upon the mountains; giving even to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry; and filling all things living with plenteousness:" or, as our Saviour himself describes it more sublimely in the words just before my text: "Behold (says he) the fowls of the air; they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into their barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them: and consider the lilies of the

" the

“ the field ; they toil not, neither do they
 “ spin ; and yet, I say unto you, that even
 “ Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed
 “ like one of them : wherefore, if God so
 “ clothe the grafs of the field, which to-
 “ day is, and to-morrow is cast into ‘ the
 “ oven, shall he not much more clothe
 “ you, O ye of little faith ? ”

What, men careless and ignorant of the truth, usually stile natural causes, are indeed nothing but mere inanimate instruments in the hand of God ; and the course of nature, as it is commonly called, is in the truth and reality of things, a mere empty name, any otherwise than signifying by an abstract way of speaking, the regularity of his operations, who made and governs all things. It is he, alone, therefore, who gives us all things richly to enjoy ; even all those things, which in a vulgar way of speaking, we usually ascribe

to natural and inanimate causes; which very causes, whensoever he pleases, he can make to be the instruments of our punishment as well as of our support. He can, as Moses elegantly expresses it, “make the heavens to be brass and the earth iron.” He can scorch with drought, or drown with moisture, or blast with unwholesome winds, in order to destroy with famine, and make a fruitful land barren for the wickedness of them that dwell therein; or, without removing the blessings themselves of nature, he can withdraw the benefit and effect of them. For “man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God:” that is, by his blessing upon the instruments of nature; which blessing, when he pleases to withdraw, and, “with rebukes, doth chasten man for sin, he maketh his beauty to consume

“fume away, as it were a moth fretting a garment.” Without the divine blessing, therefore, all care, all labour, all industry is vain; nay, even the very possession of temporal good things will afford no enjoyment. But they who, by seeking with their first and chief care the righteousness of God, have secured to themselves his favour and blessing, may safely rely upon his providence, “that he who feeds the fowls of the air, and clothes even the lilies of the field,” will much more take care of them. Not in the way of idleness and sloth; for similitudes are not to be applied literally, but in proportion to the natures of the things compared; he who provides for the fowls of the air, and the lilies of the field, in a way suitable to their nature, will much more provide for men in a way suitable to theirs, either after a supernatural manner, in such

dinary cases as was that of the Apostle's mission to preach the gospel, or else, in common cases, by the natural means of labour and industry, whereby God has appointed that "the earth shall bring forth her increase." In the use of which means it is our duty to rely upon Providence for his blessing on the effect. "If any would not work," says St. Paul, "neither should he eat." And yet the same Apostle exhorts "to be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known unto God." This is taking "thought for the things of the world, not as the Gentiles who know not God," but as those who consider that "our heavenly Father knoweth we have need of all these things."

S E R M O N X I V.

JAMES, iii. 13.

Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

WHEN the books, or letters, or discourses of men, are drawn out into considerable length, the attention of the reader or hearer, by degrees, grows weak and languid, being interrupted by the train of his own thoughts, which usually please him most because they are his own. To prevent or remedy this natural infirmity,
which

which is indeed the great obstacle, to learning and knowledge, and improvement of every kind, many methods have been invented. To this end, the Apostle from whom our text is taken, frequently makes use of that familiar appellation, “ my brethren,” intimating thereby that he has that earnest affection, that solicitude and real care for their prosperity, which might naturally be expected or hoped for from a near and dear relation, and that he is therefore entitled to their attention ; and this art he uses not unadvisedly and at random, but when he has some important truth to deliver which deserves their thoughts, and which he would imprint deeply on their minds. But of all the methods which have or may be invented, none are more effectual than interrogations. When it is asked “ who is a wise man “ endued with understanding among you ?”

the

the mind of every hearer is naturally employed in considering what will be the proper answer to this serious and important question; who, then, is this truly wise man? by what marks shall we distinguish him? what behaviour will become him? If we are at a loss, the Scripture, that fountain of all useful knowledge, will inform us, "Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom." Let him not be like the proud and haughty reasoners of this world, vain-glorious, envious, and contentious; but let him have the wisdom that is from above, and is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated, whose genuine product is the fair fruit of laudable conversation and virtuous actions. More clearly to illustrate this truth, and justify the Apostle's assertion, let us consider what necessity there is why true wisdom should

should be accompanied with, first, Meekness of thought. Secondly, Innocence of conversation. And, thirdly, Integrity of life.

At the time when Christianity was first published to the world, there were many sects and combinations of men, each of which assumed to themselves the title of Wise, professing to study and understand the great rules of duty, the laws of life, and the means of attaining perfect happiness. Much, therefore, they discovered; but not proceeding in the spirit of meekness, they often erred. One sect, for instance, observing that the variety of mischiefs which infest human society proceeded from the violence of inordinate desires, and the free indulgence of irregular appetites, endeavoured to remove the root of this evil by extirpating the passions themselves; not considering that the beauty of a virtuous character consists
in

in loving what is praiseworthy, and in an aversion to the contrary; not in destroying, but in rightly applying the passions to their proper objects, which is the very office of reason and good sense. Another sect had the courage to despise every thing that was serious and sacred in the world, to look upon religion as the effect of timidity and superstition, and, having shaken off the first principles of duty, an acknowledgment of the Supreme Being, they easily freed themselves from a sense of the secondary obligations to mankind, and shunning the labours of an active and useful life, they sunk down in ease and luxury, making reason only a parasite to pleasure.

Besides these two sects of vain pretenders to philosophy, there arose a third more extravagant and dangerous than either, and which seems to have owed its birth chiefly
to

to the manifest opposition and contrariety of the two former. These, without maintaining any opinions of their own, were always ready to combat and oppose what was advanced by any other ; as if life was given us, not to be employed in acts of virtue and mutual benevolence, but to be squandered away in idle and endless disputation. Thus were the wisest of the heathen misled by the foolishness of misapplied wisdom, by the pride of reasoning, by not adding meekness to philosophy. But if we trace out more distinctly the nature and causes of this humble virtue, we shall find it inseparably connected with that right observation, that acuteness of perception and sagacity of judgment which constitute real wisdom. Meekness arises from the sense of our own infirmities, and of others merit ; and is directly contrary to that spirit of pride which is continually
arro-

arrogating to itself an undue superiority. It is natural for men of weak understandings and narrow comprehensions to be earnestly employed in the contemplation of some seeming excellence in themselves; so to meditate upon their own endowments, which, by being near, appear full and fair before them, that the merit of others may often pass by them unobserved and unheeded. But he who is able, by the force of reason, to remove the prevailing prejudices of self-love, to weigh himself and others in the equal balance of just judgment, will find so many reasons to think humbly of himself, and to respect the excellence of others; will discover such a mixture of beauty and defect in almost every character, as will keep him at an equal distance from a servile meanness and an overbearing presumption. Pride, indeed, must necessarily be far from wisdom;

to the manifest opposition and contrariety of the two former. These, without maintaining any opinions of their own, were always ready to combat and oppose what was advanced by any other; as if life was given us, not to be employed in acts of virtue and mutual benevolence, but to be squandered away in idle and endless disputation. Thus were the wisest of the heathen misled by the foolishness of misapplied wisdom, by the pride of reasoning, by not adding meekness to philosophy. But if we trace out more distinctly the nature and causes of this humble virtue, we shall find it inseparably connected with that right observation, that acuteness of perception and sagacity of judgment which constitute real wisdom. Meekness arises from the sense of our own infirmities, and of others merit; and is directly contrary to that spirit of pride which is continually
arro-

arrogating to itself an undue superiority. It is natural for men of weak understandings and narrow comprehensions to be earnestly employed in the contemplation of some seeming excellence in themselves; so to meditate upon their own endowments, which, by being near, appear full and fair before them, that the merit of others may often pass by them unobserved and unheeded. But he who is able, by the force of reason, to remove the prevailing prejudices of self-love, to weigh himself and others in the equal balance of just judgment, will find so many reasons to think humbly of himself, and to respect the excellence of others; will discover such a mixture of beauty and defect in almost every character, as will keep him at an equal distance from a servile meanness and an overbearing presumption. Pride, indeed, must necessarily be far from wisdom;

dom; since it is founded in a mistaken opinion upon a subject of great consequence, and not difficult to be known: for the great blessings of life are not confined to particulars, the favourites of Heaven, but are bountifully distributed among the whole species—the enjoyment of reason, that great prerogative—the inward pleasure which arises from a sense of virtuous actions—a right to the fruits of their honest industry—and the protection of equal laws;—these are not limited to the rich and powerful, but are the general privileges of humanity, and, like the blessings of health and fruitful seasons, though great in themselves, by being common, are often not so much valued as they deserve: whereas the advantages which men pride themselves so much upon are usually fantastical and imaginary. A superfluity of riches, the pomp of titles, the incumbrance

brance of state, or even the flight vanity of being admired by such as they themselves despise; these lift up many men in their own imaginations above the common level of their species. But these opinions, the children of folly, as they proceed from an incapacity to distinguish the right objects of esteem, can have no place with men of true wisdom and solid understanding; especially if we add, that as they bring little joy, so they are of small effect to delude us from the real evils of common life, from the contagion of diseases, from the loss of friends, from the fickleness of fortune. They are, in themselves, neither good nor bad, but as they are used, and the use of them depends upon the temper. They are adorned by meekness; but can neither conceal, nor justify, nor excuse, the proud. The wise man, therefore, can never glory in his riches. Nor can he

glory in his wisdom, which will direct him to acquire the most amiable qualities, the most opposite to proud boasting; such as will procure the happiness designed us by nature in the mutual commerce of equal society. For, to what end is this superiority of comprehension desirable, unless it be a means of usefulness or happiness, unless it tend to alleviate the pains, to enliven and enlarge the joys of life? Its first care, therefore, will be to regulate the temper, that original fountain from which the whole stream of life will receive a tincture, to cultivate a modest, quiet, disposition, such as will easily submit to the commands of reason, is fitted to every station, and able to suit itself to any reasonable circumstances whatever.

A man with this happy constitution of mind, will easily obtain such a share of respect and affection as ought to content him;

him; he will be well with mankind; his more shining qualities will appear with double lustre, and his wants be removed by the confidence of a ready support from those whose inclinations are gained over to him by a series of good offices, from those whose duty will be urged and quickened by the enlivening motions of kindness, complacency, and love.

Men of solitary and gloomy wisdom, who consider themselves raised above the common pitch, are but ill adapted to act in concert with their species, and promote the harmony of life. They may be the subject of admiration, or perhaps of envy, but not of love. Nothing unfriendly and incommunicative can excite this passion, which is fed by a sense of mutual dependence, by an intercourse of good offices. Independence, and a contempt of others aid, are sentiments not calculated for this

world, which is so contrived that the wants of particulars can easily and only be supplied by the general union.

Every man is wise in his own profession, and every profession is calculated for the support, or ornament, or convenience, of the whole ; no member, therefore, of this compound public body can deservedly be the object of contempt, since the operation of each individual tends to perfect the œconomy of the general system. Thus, every fair, and impartial, and enlarged view of things, furnishes various motives to inculcate the virtue of meekness, and increase the respect we owe to mankind, our brethren, who share with us in the equality of a common nature, and are equally dear in the sight of our common Father, the Author and Lord of Nature, with whom is no respect of persons ; who, without distinction, will condemn the
equal

equal degrees of offence in every man to equal punishment; or in objects of mercy will accept of the same atonement; and this truth was strongly insinuated in the law of Moses, when, at the solemn numbering of the people, it was appointed that each should bring his offering. "The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel when they bring an offering to the Lord:" The reason follows: "it is to make an atonement for their souls." The inequality of fortune, or power of wisdom, is, upon this serious occasion, not considered, which can, indeed, be of no weight in the scale of moral merit.

In the Scripture history, we find the most humble demeanour conspicuous in the highest characters. He, who from the wretchedness of an exposed, abandoned infant, was raised to be the great

deliverer of the Jews; who was not only skilled in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, but was taught of God, and conversed with his Maker, as one friend talketh with another. He who had the greatest power of working miracles, ever communicated to mortal man, and employed that power to the noblest purpose, the delivery of the oppressed. This Moses was the meekest of mankind: he gloried not in being the instrument of preserving an injured people; of leading them from the most cruel bondage to a land of fruitfulness and peace; and, of perpetuating those blessings, by establishing the wisest laws and the most holy religion. In all this, he counted not himself, but attributed the praise to its due Author. But when a just occasion is offered, he shews the truest greatness of mind, by meekly acknowledging his faults, and describing even the
little

little imperfections of his person and temper, with that unreserved simplicity which affords the strongest proof of his sincerity, and greatly confirms the truth of those various and surprising events which are the subject of his story. And this disposition peculiarly qualified him to be the chosen vessel destined to that holy office. Had an enormous pride swelled his imagination, the objects of offence would have been exceedingly multiplied against him, and the power of miracles itself, would hardly have subdued that surly and stubborn people, the Jews, to his obedience. Had the lust of power inflamed his thoughts many of his actions would have been construed, by the envious, as the arts of ambition, and the stratagems of government. Had the eager desire of reputation appeared to influence his conduct, he might have been suspected of misinforming posterity by

partial representations ; but he was happily of that temper which God and man delight to honour and exalt ; and, hence the gainfaying of Corah became unsupported and inexcusable. It is needless to produce more examples to this purpose, which the history of every age, and every private man's experience, can easily supply ; since, from what has been said, it is evident that this virtue must be a principal ingredient in the frame and composition of every pleasing character. Give me leave only to observe, that one of the most amiable persons in Heathen history, the friend of Scipio, and the celebrated pattern of perfect friendship, has his character sketched out to us by one of the most elegant Heathen writers, almost in the words of our Apostle, when he mentions the " mild wisdom of Lælius ;" two words, which, joined together, have a very extensive

tensive signification, as they express the perfection of temper and understanding. Nor is meekness more effectual in recommending us to others, than in procuring a habit of inward happiness and complacency, of making us at peace with ourselves. From whence arises the uneasiness of ambition, but from a desire of showing those faculties to advantage which we think ourselves possessed of, from an opinion of our superiority, and, as it were, a right to preference? Hence the eager and confident pursuit of our desires, which soon exceeds the bounds of an honest emulation; hence our passions become impetuous and difficult to be restrained. Hence the shocks of disappointment disorder and discompose our temper, and from hence, in the words of the Apostle, arise "envy-ing and strife, confusion, and every evil work."

Pride

Pride is its own tormentor. While it affects an unrivalled superiority; while it arrogates to itself the respect and admiration of mankind, it meets with the most provoking affronts, the most irritating opposition; the experience and consciousness of which must lay the deepest foundation for inward anxiety and self-disapprobation: disapprobation from the reflection on past ill conduct; anxiety from the prospect of future consequences. For, in the hours of leisure and solitary retirement, while fancy is permitted to range without confinement, the past circumstances of life necessarily offer themselves to the imagination. He, therefore, who has little else to recollect but a series of antipathies and affronts, indignation and anger, must form to himself the most unpleasing reflections upon the dispositions of mankind towards him; while every thing around him

him carries a hostile air, and seems combined against him. What ground must this afford for the most corroding spleen! what foundations of fear and perpetual uneasiness! what agonies of jealousy, while he perceives the better footing on which persons of gentler dispositions stand with the rest of mankind. Such thoughts as these will either sink a man into the deepest melancholy, or excite in him an ardent and fierce desire of cruelty and revenge: the first of which is nearly allied to madness, and the second likewise, if thwarted and controuled; if not controuled, it purchases the unnatural joy and present sweetness of revenge, at the expence of future infinite disquiet and remorse. "The discretion, therefore, of a man deferreth his anger, and it is his glory to pass over a transgression." And this he will be able to do with great tranquillity

quility and ease of mind, if he be careful to observe the sacred rule “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think;” for that which gives the sting to affronts, is pride; and the strength of pride is founded in an undue opinion and self-conceit, from whence, as has been shewn, by a natural connection, proceed the greatest discords and calamities of life. Whereas, “the meek are blessed in their meekness, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” Let us, therefore, cultivate in ourselves this happy disposition, which is so agreeable to reason and to religion; which recommends us to others and ourselves; which in adverse fortune will secure us from contempt, in prosperous from envy; which is “the bond of peace and of all virtues.”

S E R M O N X V.

COLL. iii. 13.

Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another. If any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

THESE words are part of one of those pathetic exhortations to the practice of virtue and piety, which always take up a considerable place in the epistles of St. Paul.

They recommend to us a most important duty, which is held by many to be an improvement peculiar to Christianity, and
not

not contained in the law of nature, or of Moses. But this opinion seems to be owing to that strict and emphatic manner in which our Saviour enjoins this mutual forbearance and forgiveness, when he commands you to "love your enemies, to bless
" them that curse you, and to do good to
" them that hate you;" expressions that have clearly a reference to the corrupt interpretations of the Jews; who, in order to indulge more freely that malicious and revengeful spirit which was a part of their national character, explained away the law of charity. Notwithstanding this, they can find nothing to justify themselves in the precepts of Moses. His language is, "if
" thou meet thine enemy's ox, or ass, going
" astray, thou shalt surely bring it back
" again; if thine enemy be hungry, give
" him bread to eat, and if he be thirsty,
" give him water to drink." Nor do the
Heathens

Heathens themselves appear to have been strangers to a doctrine so important to the happiness of human life, as the forgiveness of injuries.

We find in their philosophers, and even in their poets, many excellent reflections on the meanness of revenge, which produces, at best, an ungenerous delight, that only little minds are capable of relishing. Their moral writers describe it as the proper office of magnanimity to despise affronts and injuries, and to pardon offenders with a virtuous superiority; or by good offices and benefits to make them blush at their malice, and melt their hearts to kindness.

But although it appears from thence, and from what was said before, that the doctrine of forgiveness was revealed to the Jews, and not unknown to the Gentiles, yet it may be said to belong in a peculiar manner

manner to Christianity, as it is there more clearly explained, more strongly, and more frequently inculcated; and represented, not as a high improvement in virtue, attainable only by a few, but as a general branch of duty to which all men are obliged.

Considering it as such, we shall endeavour to shew, first, what behaviour in the common circumstances of life is agreeable to the mutual forbearance and forgiveness required of us in the text; and, secondly, that the precept itself is equitable and useful, founded on solid principles, and supported by worthy motives.

“ If it be possible, as much as in you
“ lies,” says the Apostle, “ live peaceably
“ with all men.” His words imply, and
it is a truth which experience is very
ready to confirm, that there are some men
with whom it is impossible to live peace-
ably.

ably. There are tempers who take a malicious delight in disturbing the quiet of their neighbours, who never lose an opportunity of giving offence, and find out many reasons for quarrelling which would escape a common observation. And even amongst those who think and behave more moderately, yet matter of disgust and difference is continually rising, either from unlucky situations of things, or from the conflict of rival vanities, and opposite pretensions and interests.

Numbers are continually receiving prejudice (and when they are prejudiced they are commonly offended) by the carelessness or ignorance of those they live with. It is the character of one set of men to act at random, without designing good or harm, or seeming to suspect that what they do will be attended with any kind of consequences. Now though this

habit is productive of perpetual confusion and uneasiness, and often creates unnecessary provocation, whether by raising obstacles and inconveniences which give interruption to business or pleasures, or by neglecting the respects and decencies which are due to the different ranks of men: yet to be highly exasperated at affronts of this kind, that have no appearance of a bad intention, would be the mark of an haughty, malevolent spirit, and as little consistent with prudence as with charity. An equal degree of indulgence at least is due to the faults which spring from ignorance, which hardly deserve the name, where that ignorance is unavoidable, or confined to things indifferent; but where it disqualifies men for the employments they have chosen, or the duties of their station, it then becomes a species of carelessness, and by the ill effects it is liable
to

to produce, may be highly criminal. But though they who are faulty in these respects have a right to be treated with candour, and the absence of any positive ill intention may be justly pleaded as an excuse; yet they ought to remember it is such an excuse as neither wisdom nor goodness would chuse to make. He who is continually exposing himself to the hazard of committing follies and injuries, can set but a small value on the happiness of his fellow creatures, or on their esteem. Another kind of offences entitled to some degree of indulgence, are such as proceed from the violence of sudden passion, a weakness to which men, otherwise of excellent dispositions, are often too much exposed; nay, it is so frequently joined with a natural goodness of temper, that it may almost pass for a mark of it. It is but equitable, therefore, in their case, to

consider their behaviour under the rage of anger, not as the image of their real character, but of the present agitation and tumult of their minds. Their wild abusive words are not the result of settled opinions; and the violent things they do are commonly such as they immediately wish undone. But the very reasons which render them in this case the proper objects of compassion and forgiveness, will turn against them and aggravate their injustice, whenever their natural violence, which it was their duty to moderate, is inflamed by pride or malice, or the habitual indulgence of a bad temper.

It would be tedious to mention all the kinds of lesser offences which it is the business of prudence to overlook, and of charity to pardon: such are those which proceed from a confirmed habit of peevishness, which every where finds something

to

to be displeased at, and makes them who are possessed by it almost as much the objects of pity as the unhappy slaves who are forced to submit to it. Such also are the scoffs and insults with which men of an empty vivacity are apt to molest their inoffensive neighbours. The airs of insolence, the parade of vanity, the little tyranny of pride, and the strange ostentation with which so many seem desirous of discovering their bad qualities—all these, and more, are easily passed over by the man who has joined to a sense of his duty some experience of the world. But let the owners of such infirmities remember, that forgiveness is the utmost they must expect. Esteem, and love, and reputation, are the rewards of better characters. But it is a much harder task to forgive the injuries of a different kind, which spring not from temper and constitution, and

fall, as it were, by chance on them who happen to be nearest, but are pointed directly at particular persons, and envenomed with malice and premeditation. In the various commerce of the world, it is impossible for any to please all; it is difficult for the most cautious not to offend some; and it is possible for merit and innocence to pass unseen or disguised, or, if they appear in their proper shape, to be received only with envy and hatred. And from hence it happens that few even of the best men have been able to pass through life without meeting with unaccountable opposition, and perhaps where it was least expected or deserved. Some are always found who take a pleasure to vex and calumniate them; who watch for their failings, and undervalue their virtues, perplex and oppose their designs, and, if they can do nothing more, give them

them at least the displeasure of knowing they have some enemies.

As this is a very general misfortune, to all at least who are of much consequence in the world, it will be of service to enquire how men are directed, by religion and virtue, to bear it. In the first place, it seems but reasonable to ask themselves the cause of that hatred and opposition they continually meet with. Perhaps they may be able, in some measure, to account for it by their own imprudent and offensive behaviour : and surely they are bound in equity to pardon the offences which are originally of their own creating. Nor are they immediately to conclude themselves free from blame if the cause of the provocation does not appear. There are many faults, very disagreeable and provoking to indifferent persons, which their own self-love may never suspect, and which the

partiality of their friends may dissemble and excuse. If any thing of this kind appears on an honest examination, they may reap a double advantage from the ill intentions of their enemies:—they gain an opportunity of correcting and improving themselves, and of recovering that degree of esteem which their negligence had lost. And if their enmity is found to have taken its rise from the appearance only of bad qualities, or from the mistake of some very justifiable behaviour; yet it is well worth while, for the sake of the present and of future quiet, to correct, if possible, those appearances, and to remove those mistakes. A benevolent heart, with a fair and prudent behaviour, will often make its way to favour and friendship, through the midst of prejudices and dislike. It is possible, indeed, that to some people they may become objects of aversion

sion

tion for the very best qualities that belong to them, for their principles, their party, their religion, and even their honesty; or that they may meet with others so difficult as to take offence at their understanding, their family, or their faces. In this case, it must be owned, there is no remedy. For as it is in the power of no honest man to alter the former, and as it is in the power of no man to alter the latter, they must be content to keep them, with all their inconveniences. But, surely, to a wise man, it must seem more agreeable to prudence, as well as piety, rather to neglect and despise such weak, inconsiderate malice, than to engage himself in the retaliation of little injuries and low abuse.

But notwithstanding all the precautions which goodness can employ, there sometimes will arise such situations of things as must

must involve the most peaceable tempers in strife and contention. Properties and interests may be brought into dispute that are much too considerable to be resigned for the sake of agreement with an unreasonable neighbour, and to submit to some invasions and encroachments, would be to desert the cause of those whom it is our duty to protect. When there arises, therefore, an evident necessity of contention, it will be the first care of a good man to reduce that contention within its proper limits, and to quarrel as moderately as possible. To this purpose, he will confine his opposition to the great points in dispute, without suffering his passions to wander in useless invectives or peevish opposition, which tend to increase the difficulty, and lessen the means of reconciliation. When weak minds are inflamed with anger, every thing that occurs becomes

comes a matter of difference. They allow of nothing, and decide nothing, and wrangle as violently on any question that is started as on the principal subject in debate, which sometimes, in the hurry of contradiction, they forget. Now how ridiculous and irrational soever this conduct may appear, yet the most prudent find it difficult, when heated with animosity, and teased and irritated by ill offices, to preserve their discretion, and keep their attention fixed on what is important and essential: yet unless they do so to a considerable degree, they commit their quiet to the disposal of a capricious adversary, and are forced to follow wherever his impertinence and malice are pleased to lead them.

Another method by which discord is kept alive long beyond its natural term, is the practice many fall into of aspersing
and

and blackening, in all respects, the characters of such as happen to differ with them in any respect. The low falsties and imperfect truths which malice repeats and scandal improves, will be eagerly gathered up, and listened to and propagated with pleasure, to make those appear completely odious who have the presumption not to agree with them. But the virtuous man will always be careful to keep such usefess, ungenerous abuse as this very far from his tongue, and from his heart. Some matter of property, perhaps, or family difference, is the thing dispute. But is this dispute brought nearer to a decifion by expofing the failings and the vices of an adverfary ? On the contrary, the original quarrel is left entire, and feveral others are unnecessarily added to it. It is the office of charity in the midft of contention, and even by contention itself, to seek after the things that

that make for peace. And when the minds of men are made fore and tender by mutual offences, then surely is the most improper season to open old wounds, or to inflict new.

But one would be tempted to imagine, from the endeavours that many use to inflame and prolong animosity, that they really thought it a desirable state. However, in contradiction to the common practice (which to contradict in most instances, is, perhaps, no ill rule in the management of contests) the good man will not only exclude all unnecessary wrangling, but insist upon what is really important, with a temper that manifests a regard for peace as well as interest. He will therefore employ no artifice to confound, no expensive delays to tire and exhaust an adversary, but hasten to an equitable decision by the simplest, the fairest,
and

and least burthenfome methods. He will sometimes rather submit than contend too violently for little things, and will always give up unfair pretensions, though they may be of long standing, and will never refuse to refer what is really doubtful, to the judgment of the skilful and difinterested. If after this he shews a prudent firmness in the support of unquestionable rights, he will not be the less esteemed, even by such as contest them. And when an enemy comes with a heart full of strife and rancour, determined to make no concessions, and omit no provocation, and expecting himself to be treated in the same manner; but is surprized, on the contrary, to meet with truth and candour, no peevish obstinacy, no personal affront, no obstacle, no difficulty but what arises from the real intricacy of the subject in such a case—is it quite incredible that he may be
tempted

tempted to imitate a conduct which he cannot but approve; that he may respect that equitable temper which spares him so much labour and passion, and that even friendship and harmony may take root and spring from the seeds of discord. The minds of men are hardly ever so unnaturally formed that no reason can persuade and no goodness can touch them. If they persuade and touch them but seldom, the misfortune is, that in these cases they are but seldom employed. But supposing his enemy, against all probability, should be quite inflexible, yet the meekness of the righteous will not entirely lose its reward; for it sacrifices no considerable interest, it helps him, amidst the bitterness of strife, to possess his soul in peace; and the natural effect of the fair example he has given, is to confirm the excellence, and increase the esteem of his character.

After-

Afterwards, when the grounds of contention either cease of themselves, or are removed by the interposition of friends or mutual agreement, he will remove at once all unfriendly appearances. As he would admit nothing into the contest, while it lasted, except what was of importance, so he will continue the contest itself no longer when the importance of it is over. He will consider all the unpleasing scenes that are past as the natural effect of unfavourable circumstances working upon human weakness. His adversaries and himself, he knows, are imperfect, variable creatures, that owe great part of their merit to the situations in which they appear.

While he has only been a witness to their bad qualities placed in the worst light—others, perhaps, have experienced their humanity, and been made happy by their friendship. Therefore retaining no
useless

useless resentment of past offences, he will regard them as having a common title with the rest of mankind to his benevolence, and as such whom merit and future connections may one day make objects of his love.

We shall prove, in the second place, that this conduct is founded on just principles and worthy motives.

And first, this duty of forgiveness is founded upon principles of prudence and self-interest, which is in some measure anticipated in the former part of the discourse, where we considered by what reasonable motives we are led to seek peace and ensue it. That the inward sensations of kindness and good-will are preferable to those of anger and hatred, there is no need of reflection, and very little of experience to convince us. That the fruits of the one are more pleasant and profitable than

of the other ; and that to the former we owe the principal relish of all our enjoyments, is, after small reflection, as evident. But it may be doubted whether this pacific forgiving disposition is the most likely, in all circumstances, to obtain the tranquillity it wishes for.

There is, say some, a degree of tameness which invites injuries, and men who might be awed by spirit and severity, would only be made more insolent and enterprizing by submission. In answer to which, we cannot deny but that there may have been instances of too passive and resigned a behaviour. The thing itself is allowed to be possible. But it seems to have happened too rarely to form any certain judgments of the bad consequences that follow from it. The probabilities that ought to regulate our moral conduct require not any great exactness of observation. It
is

is sufficient to the present purpose that every one is enabled by his own experience to decide whether the quiet and the inoffensive, or the turbulent and contentious, are most exposed to difficulties and disgraces, and have before them the fairest prospect of happiness. For notwithstanding the meekness by which Christians ought to be distinguished, they have still a right, when attacked by outrageous and implacable injustice, to avail themselves of all just means of defence and security; and when the injuries are of a more criminal nature, and affect the welfare of the community, their hands are then strengthened by the power which was appointed as a terror to evil works, and they may use the just means of punishment.

Secondly, The duty of forgiveness is fitted to promote the general happiness of society; and when we practise it, we

obey him who commands us to follow that which is good to all men. Though this may seem an immediate consequence of what has just been said; since what tends to the good of every particular person, must necessarily tend to the good of all, *i. e.* of the public; yet the assertion has a different and more extensive meaning. The behaviour of a mind superior to passion and resentment affects not only the immediate objects of it, but propagates a spirit of peace and confidence through all who behold it. They forget, for the time at least, their low quarrels and antipathies, rely more securely on the goodwill of others, and feel higher respect for their own species, which is capable of producing such excellent patterns.

If these good emotions were to last and become habitual, what fruits of virtue might not be expected from them. But, perhaps,

perhaps, it is not so easy, for want of examples, to comprehend the public benefits, arising from a compassionate forgiving temper, as to represent the evils and calamities that must proceed from a contrary disposition. We have heard of countries where a spirit of vengeance has taken such deep root in the old habits and strong passions of the people, that calm reason and Christian charity seem to have no power to assuage them. Every injury done to them is to be deemed irreparable. Regardless of other passions and interests, they are to pursue the aggressor with insatiable fury, that allows no respite or comfort till they obtain the savage execrable delight of beholding his ruin or his death.

The fruits of these principles we are told, and they seem to be perfectly natural, are assassinations and every kind of violence ; such deep dissimulation and deter-

mined villainy as the worst of our criminals but seldom arrive at. Their quarrels have frequently engaged the families of the persons concerned, and all that have been connected with them: nay, where the principals have been eminent, they have sometimes in small states involved the public in their resentments, and brought destruction on their country. Nor is it necessary for them to have great and important subjects of strife—a word, a jest, a trivial neglect, the smallest spark of provocation will light up such irritable passions into a flame, and matter is seldom wanting to feed it. Now the bare apprehension of these evils, if it become general, must extinguish all confidence and security, and introduce a mutual distrust and fearfulness; it must banish friendship, and love, and happiness, and make society undesirable.

It

It is well for us that we are little able to judge by experience of the extent of such calamities. As for that lawless set of men in our own country, who profess to be governed only by a principle of honour, and claim a right of judging and punishing for themselves, what benefits, what advantages do they gain by it? Are they made more cautious of giving offence by the fatal consequences of offending? Are their quarrels usually more just, more important, or more honourable, in any sense of the word but their own, than such as other men determine peaceably? Do they claim this exemption from law and religion on account of their superior abilities, or merit, or usefulness? On the contrary, when they fall in the prosecution of their vengeance, the public has at least this melancholy comfort, that such dis-

asters seldom deprive her of her most deserving members.

But, thirdly, The forgiveness of injuries is not only a clear dictate of reason, but a most important command of our blessed Saviour, enforced in the holy Scriptures with great earnestness and continual repetition. Now this alone must create a presumption of something great and momentous contained in the command itself. For he who died for our iniquities, knoweth well whereof we are made, and is certainly too merciful to oppress mankind with severe and unnecessary burthens. He came, not to enslave his disciples, but to free and redeem them, and has actually rescued us from the bondage of ceremonies and the usurpation of human authority. We cannot, therefore, but imagine that a precept on which so remarkable a stress is laid by our most gracious Lawgiver, and of which
he

he has given us in his holy life, a most complete example, must necessarily tend to procure some great advantage or improvement to mankind. This, I say, we ought to conclude, from the divine authority and peculiar emphasis with which the precept is delivered, even if we could discover no extraordinary excellence in the matter of it. But that is not the case. No rule can tend more directly to produce the true happiness of life. For is any thing valuable sacrificed by the obedience? Are they who are backward to offend, and ready to forgive, more exposed to hatred and injuries than their neighbours? Is their property less secure? Have they greater difficulties to struggle with? Are their characters lessened? their talents undervalued? their friendship neglected? On the contrary, their meekness is a kind of passport, that carries them safe through the midst of
strife

strife and calumny. They are the only men, whom such as agree in nothing else, consent to speak well of. Their business goes smoothly on, and their interests are advanced without noise or opposition. The few misfortunes they are liable to are beheld with pity, and the success they may reasonably expect is attended with no envy.

And as for private and domestic happiness, this is the very temper of mind which procures it most and enjoys it best. And what is required of men, to qualify them for such felicity? Only to suppress the passions which it would be torment and misery to indulge; to keep their vanity and pride from being offensive to others and disgraceful to themselves; to spare themselves the tortures of hatred and envy, and the plagues of contention; perhaps sometimes to resign a pretension or interest that is not worth disputing, and to preserve
that

that moderation and self command, which alone can enable them to perform the business, and enjoy the blessings, of life with cheerfulness and dignity.

Now with what gratitude and adoration ought we to look up to our eternal Judge and Redeemer, who uses his unbounded right to our obedience, only, in exacting such instances of it as terminate in our own interest, and ease, and enjoyment; who employs his infinite power over the inferior orders of nature, and his supreme authority over his rational creatures, that "all things may work together for good to them that fear him." Being therefore truly sensible of your high privileges, "walk worthy of the vocation where-
"with ye are called with all lowliness
"and meekness, forbearing one another
"in love."

S E R-

S E R M O N XVI.

ECCLES. viii. 11.

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily; therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

THESE words describe to us one instance of a strange unreasonable endeavour, which has always been observable in mankind, to free themselves from that restraint of duty, which God has laid them under, only to make them happy. They see that vice is sometimes so fortunate

nate as to escape the punishment it deserves; that the same evils which are usually the consequence of wickedness, are at other times the effects of natural causes; that men often suffer by their imprudence no less than by their vices; that injustice seizes upon the profits of industry, and that flattery makes more friends and more fortunes than truth. And they often build these arguments on such partial and superficial observations as men content themselves with, when they are labouring to prove what they wish. They hope too, whatever happens to others, that they by better fortune or management may secure the pleasures of vice, and escape its inconveniences. At worst, they think that what they possess is present and substantial; what they fear is distant and doubtful; and that it is well worth while to enjoy what is in their power at the best time

time of life, though they should feel some ill effects from it at a time of life which is hardly worth enjoying. These reasonings, whether true or false, are founded on the visible appearances of nature; the facts they proceed upon, are, in some cases, undeniable; and the only question is, whether the consequences drawn from them are just.

They certainly are not, if we can prove, in the first place, that the delay of punishment is no presumption against the reality of it: and, secondly, that wickedness in general does always actually receive some part of the punishment it deserves.

The delay of punishment is no presumption against the reality of it, because even we can discover many wise reasons for that delay, and no doubt there are many more which we cannot discover. If every bad action was attended with its
immediate

immediate punishment, it is evident there could not be that liberty of choice and behaviour which is so necessary to manifest our inward principles, and make a due trial of our character. There are few of us who have not, at some time, been made sensible how much the behaviour of men is affected by the restraint of form and authority, the presence of their superiors, and the fear of displeasing them. What men do and say under such limitations, is very different from their natural, unrestrained conversation in private, and amongst their friends. It neither seems to proceed from the same temper, the same manners, or the same turn of understanding. And all this may happen without the least degree of hypocrisy, from the natural effect of awe and constraint upon human minds. But would not the impressions of awe and constraint be vastly more forcible, if they knew

knew that the hand of justice was perpetually watching over their actions? that they could do nothing and think of nothing without being made immediately accountable for it? This might, indeed, produce a greater regularity of external behaviour; but it could not produce an obedience, either honourable to ourselves or acceptable to our heavenly Father. It is the weakness, even of great and wise men, to be too much pleased with the abject submission and servile honours of their fellow-creatures; but God, who is the best pattern that man can imitate, can only be pleased by a free and reasonable service. The obedience that he values is not the ceremony of words and gestures, but the fruit of thought and conviction, and the language of the heart. It deserves to be remembered, that this single argument is in this case evidently decisive; but there

are many others perhaps of equal weight, some of which we shall briefly mention.

Though bad men ought to be looked upon in no other light, than as the disturbers and enemies of public happiness, yet it often happens that their interests are very closely connected with that of others, who are very unlike themselves; who, though exempt from their faults, are forced to share the misfortunes occasioned by them. In such circumstances is it not evidently more agreeable to the Divine Justice, rather to delay the punishments which bad men deserve, than to expose the innocent to sufferings which they do not deserve?

But not only the fortunes and the interests of men, but their good and bad qualities too, are often mingled together in a very extraordinary manner. It is a pity that great virtues should be attended
with

with great faults, but we cannot sometimes help observing it. There are characters whom we are forced to admire and love, though we cannot entirely approve them. Superior wisdom and great talents are often disgraced by trivial vanities and sordid passions. And in some persons there is a natural benevolence and goodness of heart, which almost atones for the irregularity of their conduct. Now God will certainly neither punish nor judge us, as we are apt to judge of one another, by partial likings, or partial averfions, or even by what is really blameable in us alone; but from the true tenor and complete view of our actions. If therefore what is useful and virtuous in us, be upon the whole more considerable than our faults (and we ought to hope that it is so in most men), it then becomes the interest of the world, that we should obtain a re-

spite at least of our punishment, if not an entire remission of it.

Providence too, that wisely conducts the uncertain views and passions of men to the accomplishment of its own great ends, very frequently and very justly tolerates bad men, in consideration of the good they produce without design. The excessive love of money, or power, or applause, the passions of envy and resentment, are certainly very unjustifiable motives ; yet they sometimes act in subordination to the just views of Government, or concur to support the cause of religion and liberty. The public, indeed, is very little obliged to those who are serviceable to it only by accident ; but in the mean time it reaps some benefit from their vices, and those vices may well be tolerated as long as they are beneficial. But if, in any case, the wicked happen to produce as much mischief as might be expected

pected from their bad intentions, yet great part of it may justly fall upon others as bad as themselves, the greatest part will certainly return upon their own heads, and the good may even reap an advantage from it. They may confirm their patience, correct their faults, improve their virtues by their sufferings, and the world by their example. These, indeed, are advantages which most men had rather be without; but yet that they are very real and very considerable, is not only the sense of Scripture, but of the wisest men in all ages who have applied themselves to the study of their duty.

But the kindest, the most benevolent, and consequently, the justest motive of God's delaying the punishments that sinners deserve, is that they may grow better by his goodness, and so cease to deserve them. The wickedness of men in general,

is not owing to settled principles (for then the case is desperate), but to imprudent passions and attachments, which make them for the present discover a seeming interest in the transgression of their duty. But our manners, our passions, and our principles, are perpetually fluctuating and subject to the casual influence of constitution, time and fortune.

What important, though insensible changes must a man pass through in his progress from the wild desires and the thoughtless vivacity of youth, to the caution, formality, and deliberate selfishness of age. Now it must be hard indeed, if in all those revolutions of temper and opinions, no circumstances should happen to come up, that are favourable to reason and virtue. Time continually gives us new views of things, and makes us better acquainted with them; misfortunes point out our faults,

faults, and experience the way to mend them. Much may be learnt, and encouragement may be given to good intentions, by the few examples we meet with of prosperous and rewarded virtue. Strong impressions may be made by the influence of good example, and the friendship of good men. This is the discipline through which Providence leads us; and these are the reasons that justify him for delaying the punishment of our sins; but the same reasons will render us most unjustifiable, if we delay the reformation of them.

We may add too, that this divine forbearance and long suffering, is not only beneficial and right in itself, but it is also a proper pattern for our imitation. “ Bre-
“ thren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye
“ which are spiritual restore such a one in
“ the spirit of meekness, considering thyself
“ lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one

“another’s burthens, and so fulfil the law
“of Christ.” This is that almost divine art,
so happily described and employed by the
Apostle, of leading men to a sense of their
duty and happiness, by mildness and per-
suasion. The great majority, who stand in
need of reformation, are far too numerous
and too obstinate to be controled by mere
force. It is, therefore, prudent to submit
to the inconveniences we cannot remove,
to allow for the power of custom and ex-
ample, the slow progress of nature and
habit, and not to expect that men should
become in an instant, what we would
have them. Even the laws themselves,
whose very end is to reform by punishment,
are often forced to comply with this
method.

We were to prove, in the second place,
That wickedness always receives some part
of its punishment.

It

It has pleased the gracious Author of our being, who formed us for his own glory and our happiness, to make our duty itself the direct and immediate instrument of it. And he who thinks otherwise, is ignorant of his own privileges, and injurious to the merciful intentions of our heavenly Father. Particular acts of wickedness (of injustice for instance) may, contrary to their natural tendency, be sometimes so circumstanced as to carry with them the appearance of advantage; or in the common language of the world, may be really advantageous, *i. e.* they may obtain some of those temporal things that are called good, because they may be made so by a right application of them. Unless this was the case, wickedness would be so entirely without excuse, that it would be without temptation. But though a single act of injustice may sometimes appear to be profitable,

profitable, yet a character formed upon injustice, can only lead to ruin and misery, and in effect takes the shortest road to it. He who injures his neighbour makes mankind his enemy, which must appear to be a very serious misfortune, if we consider how much our own happiness depends upon the esteem and good-will of our fellow-creatures. But there are men who seem to think, that a moderate degree of dishonesty, prudently applied, may in many situations be of excellent service; as poison taken in a small quantity, may lose its virulence and become medicinal. Yet, if we consider the effect that every kind of unfair dealing, even those inferior instances of it which escape the notice of the law, produce in the common intercourse of life upon the fortunes and characters of those who use them; how contemptible and odious they grow when discovered, or
even

even suspected ; how entirely they blast all the fruits of confidence, credit, and goodwill ; and how frequently they ruin the very interests they were employed to promote ; perhaps, it may seem not unreasonable to conclude, that injustice is as far from being profitable in the detail as it is in the gross. A single act of intemperance may certainly cause some pleasure, and in appearance no detriment. But a habit of intemperance, we all know, will infallibly produce a greater crowd of evils than we are able to number. Now, if every single act was in itself harmless, there could be nothing very prejudicial in the sum total of them. And on the contrary, if inevitable disgrace and misery are the certain consequences of many acts of intemperance, there certainly must be more damage and more danger, than we are apt to suspect in every single instance of it. But men
are

are imposed upon and hindered from perceiving the misery they bring upon themselves, by the slow and gradual manner of its coming on. In this case, as in the growth of vegetables, or change of seasons, we discern the operation only by its effects, and after a time perceive that an alteration has taken place, without perceiving the steps by which it was made. And thus, while bad men are gradually corrupting their moral character, and proceeding in a constant change from bad to worse, they may seem for a long while, to negligent and partial observers, to continue just the same.

There is no man who has not observed, and few, perhaps, who have not felt how much the strength and purity of the mind, the calmness of the temper, and the enjoyment of health and domestic peace are apt to suffer, by unjust pursuits and vicious gratifications. And if these disgraces and sufferings

sufferings continue to accumulate to the last weary stage of life, it then becomes apparent to the most careless observer, how very punctually the wages of sin are paid. Here the illusion is cleared up, and that equitable truth is confirmed by plain experience, that as men sow so shall they reap; and that a full harvest of misery is the natural produce of all the scattered seeds of iniquity.

But yet these calamities, great as they are, are neither the most suitable, nor the most considerable punishments of wickedness. They may sometimes be derived from natural causes, and affect the innocent, or oppress the virtuous with evils which the guilty may in some degree escape. Besides all these, there are proper penalties annexed to guilt by a natural necessity, which no good fortune, or dextrous management can separate from it.

The

The corruption of heart and temper, discovering itself in a perpetual conflict with truth and reason, or a sad indifference to right and wrong; a slavish obedience to imperious and impotent passions; a disposition that cannot be satisfied with the pleasures and employments that Providence has allotted to it; a want of relish for the natural enjoyments and the true happiness of their station; a sense of having done ill, and at least an uncertain dread of vengeance—these are qualities which not only cause misery, but constitute it; and these are plainly increased and strengthened by every vicious action of every kind. Here the punishment is as real and immediate as the crime, and not the less so because it may happen to be unobserved.

I need not remind you, that we have hitherto confined our observations to that
kind

kind of divine justice which is exercised over men in their present transitory state. We leave the secrets of another world in that awful obscurity in which revelation has placed them ; only resting assured, that the punishments there provided, will be a most dreadful supplement to any defect of severity in the present administration of Providence. Confining ourselves, therefore, to that portion of the divine administration, that great and fleeting representation of good and evil which is passing before our eyes, we may be convinced that it is not in the intention of Providence, that we should obtain her blessings without obedience to her laws. The great question in which every particular person is interested, is, whether it is best to accept of the good things our Maker offers us upon the conditions he has annexed to them, or whether we shall trust to our own skill
and

and dexterity to acquire them upon easier terms. It is worth while to observe how those have succeeded who have made the experiment. Religion directs us in the pursuit of pleasure, to take temperance, innocence, and decency for our guides. Have the young and the gay been more fortunate in their choice who seek for her in riot, excess, and dissipation?

There are many ways that lead to the acquisition of wealth and power, besides the plain path of diligence, merit and integrity; but is there any one so safe, so honourable, so truly pleasing?

But suppose, if the thing is possible, that men had already acquired, by the most dishonest methods, all the wealth and power they wish for. Is the great end attained, and their happiness secured? On the contrary, they find themselves subject to as rigid laws in the use of their advantages

tages as in the acquisition of them. To the abuse of wealth and the abuse of power (besides the disgrace and sufferings that are brought upon their owners) is owing the greatest part of that complicated misery, which in all countries oppresses the laborious and innocent race of men. Yet these are under the immediate protection of Heaven, who frequently relieves their distresses, but always avenges them. There is a divine Spirit, that, with an art far surpassing all human cunning, can punish our unjust pursuits by the very gratification of them. How vain then and fruitless must be the result of all human endeavours to deceive the only Being that cannot be deceived! What can reason or prudence direct in such a case, but to place our hopes of future prosperity and happiness in the most implicit and unlimited resigna-

tion to the will of our heavenly Father ?
casting all our care upon him; for we have
the utmost assurance, from his word, his
works, and his paternal goodness, that
he careth for us.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



